**My Shadow Ran Fast**

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Someday we’ll go places
New lands and new faces
The day we quit punching the clock.
The future looks pleasant,
But at present
Let’s take a walk around the block.

Anybody with gray hair, or no hair, will recognize those wonderful lyrics written by Harold Arlen. This grand old song, made famous by Ella Fitzgerald and, later, Mel Tormé, is about a couple who have such big plans for the future that instead of feeling overwhelmed, they decide to take a walk around the block and think about it.

Imagine for a moment: You take a walk around the block with me during the time we have together, and I will do my best to get you to open up your mind to a few new things you may not have thought about.

More people are injured coming down a mountain than going up. You have heard or read this before. The same is true with the work and career that defined most of us and the clients we work with.

Most of you who work in the field of retirement planning do so using the left side of your brain most of the time. I am going to ask you to think about using the other side more often.

What do I mean?

The left side of your brain knows that there are four directions: north, south, east, and west. Case closed. But if I ask the other side of your brain, “How many directions are there?” you might wonder, *Doesn’t that depend on where someone is going*? The empathetic person follows up by asking, “Do you need a ride?”

The Navajo Indians had seven directions: north, south, east, west, up, down, and in.

If you find this type of thinking to be helpful, you will appreciate what we will cover here. If you don’t really get this and think retirement planning is all about numbers and not about feelings, you may temporarily be in the wrong room. It’s OK; just because you don’t know where you’re going doesn’t mean you’re lost.

What’s the longest distance between two places? Time. If you don’t think so, open up a drawer and look at a stack of old photographs.

Middle-aged women: Look at your hands. Those aren’t your hands; they belong to your beautiful mother.

Middle-aged men: Who was the old guy you saw in the mirror last night on your way back to bed after you went to the bathroom? It’s OK; he’s there every night.

First, you’re young.

Then, you’re middle-aged.

Then, you’re wonderful; enjoy it.

I don’t manage money, and I don’t manage people. I manage relationships. I’m in the human-nature business. Some of these relationships are with people who want to retire or who are already retired. Most of us can figure the rate of return on money. However, the rate of return with people and your relationship with them is exponential.

Math has no emotion, but people do.

A middle-aged client walks into your office and says, “I’m ready to retire.” For most of you, the first question you ask will pertain to money. An empathetic advisor says, “Gosh, congratulations! I need to ask you a tough question. When was the last time you took a month off from work, stayed home, and still felt fulfilled?” The difficult part of retirement for a lot of successful people isn’t about the money; it’s about the perceived loss of importance. For a lot of people, it is a blow to their ego; a lot of intelligent people never see this on the horizon. If you gently point this out to people and talk about it, you’ll separate yourself from the herd.

Sometimes the only thing you know is what something isn’t.

Several years ago, I had a heart-to-heart talk with a friend of mine who ran the trust department of a well-respected bank. He told me that he was going to retire, and I asked him a one-word question: “Forever?” He chuckled and said no; it was just going to be temporary. He said that the bank had him managing employees 90 percent of the time and customer relationships 10 percent of the time, and he hated it. He loved working with customers and felt managing employees was painful, and it drained him.

I asked him if he could reverse the percentages would he work again. He said yes, but he needed to take a year or two off to recharge. He wanted to travel, read, spend time with his wife, and look for another assignment. I said to him that it sounded like he really wasn’t retiring; he was just “repotting” himself. He looked at me like a light came on and said, “That’s it; you’ve got it. That’s what I want to do; repot myself.” Over the years, when we would bump into each other, he would always refer to this conversation.

Henry Miller wrote, “One’s destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.”

In a client visit, if people look or act like they might be struggling, and you ask, “Is everything OK?” they probably aren’t going to open up to you all the time. However, if you ask the same people, “How are you sleeping?” most of the time they will tell you what’s bothering them.

This type of intuitive behavior is very valuable in our profession. We used to have a corner on the market for this style of “active empathy.” And I am afraid it will eventually become obsolete if people keep looking at their phones all the time. Remember, if people are texting like mad, their listening, speaking, and writing skills will decline or, for young people, may never even develop.

A retired person has time for meaningful conversations. Do you want to be a great retirement advisor? Then be a good communicator. Play detective; look for clues. Listen for what isn’t said. Be intuitive. Again, we used to have a corner on the market for this. Separate yourself from the herd.

The amateur works until he or she gets it right; the Million Dollar Round Table member works until he or she can’t get it wrong.

If clients come into your office and say they are leaving a career or an employer after many years, it’s only natural to say, “What happened?” Sometimes you will be told, and sometimes you will not.

When told someone is leaving a company after 35 years, or a profession after 40 years, empathetic advisors will ask their client to sit down and then ask one simple question, “Is there peace in your heart?”

Separate yourself from the herd.

“We were both about the same age: too young and too old.” Those beautiful words are truer today than when Dylan Thomas wrote them years ago. Retirement to a lot of great people is working less but enjoying the same income. You *can* have your cake and eat it too.

There are a lot of professional people who don’t have the luxury of slowing down. They either have to work or they have to retire, but they aren’t able to do both. We can. Do you know how fortunate that makes us? We could live a dozen other lifetimes and wouldn’t be as lucky as we are this afternoon.

Have you ever read the book *Moneyball* or seen the movie? If you live in a big small town, it helps to be good in more than one area.

Do you think it would make good sense for anyone going into retirement to have long-term care insurance? It’s the elephant in the room; at least have the conversation.

Do you think life insurance would complement a married couple’s retirement plan? Isn’t it easier to spend more if you had a second-to-die policy in place for surviving children? With two people, both age 65, there is a 50/50 chance that one of them will live to be 90.

Write annuities on older people; these products have never been better. The children of older clients will love you for it.

Financial markets go up . . . then they go down . . . then they go back up again, but not necessarily in that order.

Markets were tumbling in the fourth quarter of 2008 and all through 2009. I was meeting with people and starting each conversation by saying, “I know you’ve lost money, I know things aren’t going as well as we would hope, and I want you to remember, this is only temporary. You have a great brain, a beautiful family, and a wonderful home; be thankful and remember, you could have been born a dozen other lifetimes, and you wouldn’t be as lucky as you are this morning.”

I told this to a longtime client of mine one morning, and he replied, “I’ve lost $300,000 in the market.”

I asked, “Do you think it will come back in five years?”

He said, “I guess so.”

And I said, “Then let’s put $300,000 of five-year term in force to guarantee it in case you aren’t here.”

And he said, “That’s a great idea.”

A few years ago, a client of mine was retiring as a partner from an accounting firm, and over breakfast he told me that he couldn’t believe Arthur Andersen was in trouble. It was a very prestigious CPA firm that went under. This man’s firm was going to be paying out half a million dollars from his partnership account over the next five years to him, and I asked him if he needed the money.

When he replied, “Of course I do,” I suggested that we place $500,000 of 10-year term in case he died or, God forbid, his firm collapsed while it was paying him out or his widow out.

He thought it was good idea. I don’t need an elevator speech; it’s already written on my business card: “We connect great people with good ideas.”

Do you play bridge? One of the reasons bridge continues to fascinate players all over the world is that in order to become even sort of good at it, you have to be willing to be bad at it for a long time.

When I started in the life insurance profession, I took a vow of poverty. I didn’t qualify for the Million Dollar Round Table. I don’t think I would have qualified for an end table. But now, after all these years, and becoming a little better with each year, I don’t want to give it up. A lot of you either feel the same way I do, or you will one day.

This isn’t a job; it’s a calling.

I am a classically trained life insurance salesman and writing life insurance at the high end is more art than science. It’s a combination of percentages and social intelligence, and when I am doing this well, I feel good about myself. Believe me, I am not the only one who feels this way. Do you have conflicting feelings about less work and more play or more play and no work at all at older ages? It’s OK.

I feel much more grateful than I do proud. It comes with age, and MDRT added just the right amount of seasoning for me to know that I have had a great life, just like many of you.

A five-star restaurant serves fish at five different temperatures: cold, cool, room temperature, warm, and hot. If this is so, then there must be more than one way to retire. Statistics tell us that not only are people working later into their years, they also will retire for a while and then go back to work.

Remind others, clients, and prospects that “retirement” isn’t necessarily out at age 65 anymore. Maybe it’s out at age 60 and back for five years at age 65. Or part-time from age 56 on.

In golf, if you don’t like your drive on the opening hole, weekend players will hit another one. It’s called a “breakfast ball.” Talented, creative people can do the same thing with retirement.

*Retirement* is one word that can take people on many paths. It’s a coat of many colors.

We have products today that have given people tremendous flexibility. Be on the lookout to act as someone’s tour guide on this path that occasionally has a few left turns. Why do I say this as a cautionary phrase?

One of the highest suicide rates in America today is among retired men over the age of 70 who were successful in their work life. It’s great to do business with people who want to retire someday, but some of these clients need the inner satisfaction and emotional stability that only work, or part-time work, provides.

Gangway, we’ll begin
When our ship comes in.
You’ll sit on my lap,
All over the map.

To London in May time,
Venice in play time,
To Paris in time for a frock,
To Boston in bean time,
Darling, meantime,
Let’s take a walk around the block.

A friend of mine held the No. 3 position in a very large company and then held the top position in another organization. When he retired, he took a proactive stance and sent letters to 20 retired chief executive officers requesting the chance to interview them. A dozen of these men took him up on the meeting, and most of them stated rather openly that the first few years of retirement were much harder than working. They were challenged, and not in a good way. This new routine was less fulfilling. And some wives weren’t that crazy to have them home for lunch or in the middle of the day.

People who are comfortable in their own skin seem to adapt best. But the higher up a person has gone, the harder it is. Remember, most of us have had a front row seat to a lot of great examples of how to do it right. If clients are struggling with this, pick up the phone. Wish them well; take them out for lunch. At the end of the day, what most people want from other human beings is kindness. Go out and be kind; we’re good at this.

A pessimist says, “My house burned down; I’ve lost everything.” An optimist says, “My house burned down, but I can see the sky.” Some clients come into your life as blessings, and some clients come into your life as lessons. I am allergic to negative thinkers; upbeat people make everything better. Charles Dickens was right: It is the best of times; it is the worst of times. You decide.

Is it hard to marry philosophy with reality? It’s difficult. You will witness challenges for newly retired people, and they won’t always be monetary. A successful, retired acquaintance of mine shared with me in the sixth month of his retirement that he poured out all the liquor in his house. When I asked why, he said that the five o’clock cocktail hour started getting earlier each month.

In life, we don’t get three wishes; we get an abundance of them. I asked a very stylish 67-year-old educator client of mine who had enough money to retire why she didn’t. She said that she noticed people she taught with who had retired still wore the same clothes five years after they had stopped working. I thought this was fascinating.

A few years ago, a retired client of mine who had moved to Florida said that he knew he was bored when he started checking every morning who would be on *Oprah* that afternoon.

There’s a story Jim Koch wrote about the late author Kurt Vonnegut. Maybe it’s true, maybe it isn’t, but it’s worth repeating. Vonnegut was at a party, seated next to a very rich fellow who was bragging nonstop about wealth and all of his possessions. The man owned so many Picassos that he even had one hanging in a guest bathroom. Vonnegut finally interrupted and reportedly said, “You know, I have something you would really love to have, but I don’t think you’re ever going to be able to have it.”

The wealthy man said, “What do you have?” He had the look on his face like he was ready to shell out anything it might cost just so that he could say he had one too.

Kurt Vonnegut looked at him and slowly said, “I have *enough*.”

Want less, appreciate more.

I watched the U.S. Open golf tournament on television last summer. The announcer said that the course architect had laid out the holes so that the wind would be the invisible hazard. There is an invisible hazard for retired people. It’s keeping up with the Joneses. Here’s a news flash: Facebook isn’t real life.

If this were a county music song, I would stop singing and start talking; it’s called “Recitation.”

A person will never be the world’s richest, thinnest, or best-dressed man or woman. However, a person can decide to be thankful. Being grateful and appreciative are intellectual choices.

If people aren’t comfortable in their own skin working, they certainly won’t be when they’re retired.

Abundance is a state of mind. We don’t always need more. We need today, and we need each other, and that will be enough; it always has been.

First, you’re young. Then, you’re middle-aged. Then, you’re wonderful. Be age appropriate . . . and enjoy the wisdom that comes with it. We could have been born a dozen other lifetimes, and we wouldn’t have been as fortunate as we are this afternoon.

Want to make retired people feel good? Give them a sincere compliment. Older people, and even middle-aged people, tend to be overlooked and marginalized by society and the media. Young people look at us some days like we’re invisible.

Make a stranger feel good.

“Hey, your hair looks great.”

“Gosh, I love your glasses.”

“Gee, that’s a sharp sweater you have on.”

Not only will they feel better; you’ll feel good as well. Don’t think so? Try it.

Kindness is an intellectual choice. Love doesn’t need an interpreter; brighten someone’s day.

I was reading a restaurant review in one of the papers I subscribe to, and it said, “Service: Good once they notice you.”

People who have done well don’t expect good service; they demand great service. And if you don’t provide it, word gets out. Tomorrow does not exist until midnight; get it done today.

How we do something is how we do everything. Have good manners; they never go out of style. Treat people with dignity, respect, and understanding; it’s the genius for friendship.

Attending Annual Meetings in my life has been valuable, sometimes invaluable. And, occasionally, priceless.

This is my 35th in a row. To some of you, that may seem like a lot, and to some of you, it may seem like just a good start. To me, it’s both.

I don’t know where those 35 summers went.

My shadow ran fast. I have the same hands and the same feet. However, my heart and brain have grown because of the Million Dollar Round Table.