



SUCCESS. NOW WHAT?

BOB BUFORD

Much has been written about the “graying of America.”

According to a recent CNBC.com article, nearly a third of America’s workers are now over 50, and employees over age 65 outnumber teenage workers for the first time since 1948. We are an aging population with all of the implications that brings for our society: Greater demand for health care workers, more senior housing, etc. But what does this development mean for our successful leaders, many of whom are also aging and, in many cases, reluctantly approaching retirement? Every day, men and women who have achieved great things both personally and professionally and reached the very top of the ladder are being put out to pasture to rarely, if ever again, use the significant gifts and talents that helped them for the first 50 or so years of their lives. I would suggest that it doesn’t have to be that way. In fact, I would posit that the next part of their lives could cement their legacy and in many ways be their most important years with perhaps their greatest contribution.

I have been through it myself. After building a successful cable TV operation, I sold it all and had to figure out what I was going to do. I used the metaphor of a football game and I envisioned myself as being at halftime. There was a lot of game left to be played and I had to figure out a strategy.

My mentors, combined with a lot of research and soul searching, led me to what was next. And, what I found there surprised me in some ways. Here's what I learned: An achiever can and must be strategic about building the next phase of their lives, and if they do, it can be an amazing and wonderful time, filled with contribution and new and different challenges and achievements.

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I've been blessed with great mentors who helped me think through all of this; Peter Drucker, Jim Collins, and others. They, too, have experienced the “What now?” moment that inevitably comes right on the heels of great success. “The old model of arduous career followed by relaxing retirement should be jettisoned,” says Collins. “And, it should be replaced by the idea that the second half can be more creative, more impactful, more meaningful, more adventurous, and filled with even more learning.”

For this to happen, we have to get rid of some of the old conventional wisdom about work and retirement. Not so long ago, work was a means to an end and retirement meant that we didn't have to be somewhere in particular anymore. We could fish, work on our golf game, and finally relax if there was enough money to allow us to do that. But there is a new world of work out there these days where people really like what they do, and because they still have all of their faculties and energy, they'd like to continue doing it in some way. Peter Drucker spotted this trend and said that this new version of work would allow people to "have parallel careers where they can serve their values by putting to work what they are good at, using their strengths, knowledge and experience that they have already gained."

So, the first idea we have to jettison is the one that says that for us to move from success to significance in our lives we have to stop doing what we are good at and make a seismic change—from the boardroom to the mission field, for example. Yes, some people do that. We have had people we have mentored at the Halftime Institute who have made exactly that decision and are completely happy with it. But we have also mentored very successful people who have used their significant platforms, talents and strengths to make important contributions in their communities and fill needs and roles that they are more comfortable in.

And, let me be honest about this: I still have a penthouse in the city, a country home at the East Texas farm, and a new Lexus. I do not believe it is in keeping with my “calling” to assume a diametrically different lifestyle from the one I have enjoyed throughout my life. Many people avoid taking the risk for a better second half because they mistakenly think it necessitates a drastic change. Don’t make that mistake.

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The second assumption that we need to get rid of is that age somehow disqualifies us from what’s next. Again, this is not true, and believing it will hamstring you and keep you from making a significant contribution. We are living longer, now, and we are healthier than ever. We “retire” and we are at the top of our games with more knowledge and experience than at any time in our lives. We are assets that any organization could really use, and we achievers need to find those organizations that need us most and get back to work.

With that in mind, here are some ideas about how to accomplish that:

- » **Know your financial position.** While it is true that the halftime season involves some level of financial commitment, you may be in better financial shape than you think. When most people approach middle age, their financial needs begin to decline. Mortgages are either paid off or close to being paid off. The kids are out on their own, which means lower grocery bills, fewer trips to clothing and shoe stores, less of your paycheck being set aside for college funds. And if you were wise enough to contribute to a savings account or mutual fund, you probably have at least a small nest egg that could help provide seed capital for a second-half enterprise.
- » **Find or start a mission you can afford.** While there will always be some risk involved in the halftime season, no one should irresponsibly jump in over his head in pursuit of his halftime dream. Ideally, whatever you choose to do should be sustainable, since you won't have a lasting impact if your endeavor bankrupts you. Again, halftime isn't about money—it's about mission, and once you discover yours, you will find a way to carry it out responsibly. Money follows good ideas.

- » **Renegotiate your work situation.** The difficulty in finding skilled replacement employees and the rising costs of recruiting and training those replacements has led many employers to do whatever is reasonable to keep their experienced workers. Therefore, if you are a valuable employee, you have an unprecedented opportunity to bargain with your employer about a work situation that allows you to invest in your second half.
- » **Downsize yourself.** One of the interesting outcomes of corporate downsizing is the number of people who lost their jobs and either started their own small businesses or became “contract” workers, often ending up better off financially than when they worked for their company.
- » **Simplify your work.** Ryan Daniels was an account executive for a major advertising agency, and by the time he was forty, he had a very high-paying job that demanded seventy-hour weeks with a bonus of unrelenting stress. He heard that inner voice telling him he couldn’t keep living like that. Yet he still needed a job. He moved to a much smaller company where he could, in his own words, “coast” and still excel. In essence, he gave himself an additional twenty to thirty hours a week, which he used to mentor less-experienced marketing professionals in nonprofit ministries. Ask yourself, “Is all of this stress and the long hours worth the big paycheck?” If not, you could either do what Ryan did, or hire on directly with a nonprofit, or let your full-time job also become your second-half career.

The Money Question

One of the most frequently asked questions about halftime has to do with money: do you have to be wealthy to have a significant second half? Because the “money issue” seems to be a barrier to so many, it deserves some additional thinking to clear up some misconceptions.

First, a simple answer: you do not have to be wealthy to enjoy a productive and significant second half. Halftime is not about money; it is about responding to your inner voice. People at all economic levels eventually sense the need to invest their lives in something more than their jobs, the pursuit of money or security, or whatever measure of success they might use. I believe it is a universal need that is placed within each of us, and regardless of your work situation or level of income, you can find ways to satisfy that longing to make a difference and leave a legacy. For example, Cathey Brown overcame various business struggles and her own alcoholism to start Rainbow Days, an agency that serves children of alcoholics. Lisa Trevino-Cummins got a job right out of college with Bank of America in Texas and convinced her employer to help redevelop inner-city neighborhoods. Ultimately, this led to her being tapped by President George W. Bush to lead his Faith-Based and Community Initiative. Talk about an exciting second-half mission from someone who was never wealthy!

It's true that people with significant wealth have more options and possibly more freedom to determine how they will invest themselves in the second half. When I made the decision to leave my first half, I knew that I could fund it with the capital I had accumulated. Not everyone can do that—in fact, probably the majority of people cannot. But I also know many wealthy people who “get” halftime but are waiting until they make just a little more money. They have allowed money to become an excuse for business as usual. At the same time, I know people who depend on a regular paycheck to pay the mortgage and other living expenses but are having the times of their lives pursuing adventures that exploit all of their gifts and abilities for a greater good.

Another popular misconception that goes along with the “only wealthy people can do it” argument is the idea that halftime is really just an early retirement with a new hobby. In other words, wealthy people have the luxury to “quit work,” enjoy life, and write checks to a favorite charity or volunteer occasionally with a nonprofit.

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Halftime is actually the opposite of retirement, an alternative to the boredom most retirees experience. In reality, you may work harder in your second half than you did in the first. I know I have. When I handed the operating leadership of my company over to someone else so that I could devote my primary energy to my second-half mission, my work schedule did not change appreciably. I still went to my office every day, sat through long meetings, hired people, brokered deals, and traveled.

We have to be careful with the idea that the object of work is to earn enough money so that we can someday quit working and live a life of leisure. As the late Fred Smith Sr. once told me, “Work is the psychological glue that holds a person together.” There’s a fascinating study in the book *Flow* by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi in which the author attached beepers to individuals and polled their levels of satisfaction at different times. Although they all expressed a desire for more leisure time, they actually expressed much higher levels of satisfaction while they were working in pursuit of some meaningful goal than when they were engaged in sedentary activity. Leisure is an occasional gift we need to give ourselves regardless of our life stage, but full-time leisure, as appealing as it may sound, is simply not good for your mental or emotional health. It never works. If your motivation for halftime is leisure or more free time, then maybe you just need a long vacation or a sabbatical.

It is not unusual for people in stressful jobs to run out of steam and take an extended break, but that shouldn't be confused with halftime. Halftime is more about time and talent than it is about treasure. It starts with the question, "What do I believe?" and moves to "What do I do with what I believe?" It is about taking your God-given talents and all you have learned in your first-half career and finding ways to use those for the greater good. Few people are able to connect their work to their beliefs in the first half. The second half gives everyone a greater opportunity to do that.

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The Hero's Journey

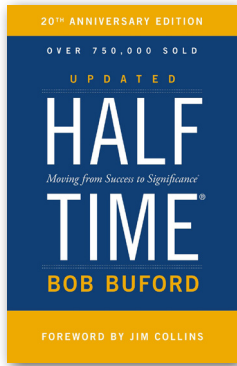
Every person alive has what the famed Swiss psychologist Carl Jung called a “life task” encoded within his or her being. The Greeks called it “destiny.” If we don’t finally get around to actualizing this unique calling, it follows us around the rest of our lives like an accusing shadow.

This is the hero's journey. And it is not just reserved for Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. Think of Wendy Kopp, who as a Princeton senior with, I expect, meager funds, formed Teach for America to encourage elite college graduates to spend their first two years teaching in inner-city schools. More than seventeen thousand top students have followed her lead so far, and there's a huge waiting list of students who want to follow their lead.

We have all heard that people do not live on bread alone. Regardless of your financial condition, as you approach your halftime, you will likely begin to get restless with your current work. Pay attention to that restlessness, because it is the yearning of your soul to become what you were Divinely wired to be.

Shake off the doubts and the naysayers and get busy. You've got more important work to do in your second half. 🏈

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS | Bob has played active roles in Young Presidents' Organization and World Presidents' Organization and served on the board of the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard. Buford was the 2000 recipient of The Samaritan Institute Award and the 2005 Christian Management Association Award. Lead Like Jesus presented Buford the Leadership Award in 2008 and Roaring Lambs Ministry honored him in 2009. He was the 2010 recipient of the J. Erik Jonsson Ethics Award from SMU Cary M. Maguire Center for Ethics and Public Responsibility. For outstanding resources, self-assessment tools, and stories to help you on your Halftime journey, visit www.Halftime.org.

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