



Mitchell Kauffman: A Unique Approach to Life Transitions

Life Transition Group of Los Angeles focuses on achieving balance as a key to happiness

By Mitchell E. Kauffman, CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™

“What am I going to do after I retire?”
“How can I stay relevant?” “Do I have all of my bases covered to help ensure financial independence after I stop working?”

Certainly, questions such as these are often posed by both men and women as they ponder their future after retiring from careers. Considering that 75 million baby boomers will be reaching retirement age over the coming years, there will be no shortage of inquisitors in the foreseeable future.

A novel solution has been the Life Transition Group, an informal collection of age 60-something men and women who have been meeting quarterly during the past four years in the West Los Angeles area. Their agenda follows what founders Ron Dresher and Brian Harris convey in their group’s mission acronym, “C.H.A.I.R.S.,” which stands for charity, health, achievement, independence (financially), relationships and spirituality.

Virtually all mental health professionals agree that achieving balance in life is a key to happiness. The group, known as LTG, strives to accomplish just that, by inviting guest speakers who are professionals on fields related to their acronym. Group meetings consist of a dozen to two dozen members, varying based on each one’s availability.

One meeting featured a speaker talking about his experience in assisting a nonprofit that has helped troubled youths find their way. Not only was the cause compelling, but more important to the group was what the speaker was able to derive personally from having

risen “to a cause beyond himself.”

On a separate occasion, a physical therapist/trainer/nutritionist talked about aging and how we can have tremendous positive impact on our health not just by general exercise and proper eating, but by “personal care with a purpose.” The idea is to embrace a lifestyle that supports all aspects of body well-being and preventive maintenance.

Still another was a psychologist-psychoanalyst, who presented a framework for enhancing the quality of marital and other relationships. A key suggestion was a five-step process to help ensure we are “in the moment” to fully experience many of the emotional gratifications that are right in front of us every day.

None of this, of course, would reach the full benefit if we are without a plan for your financial future. So as the financial advisor who has addressed the group on several occasions, I stressed the importance of having a comprehensive financial plan. “It is pretty challenging to reach higher levels on the happiness scale if you are worried about money,” I have stated in citing Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs pyramid. So I provide timely reports on portfolio planning and the importance of obtaining “Your Number” for achieving financial independence.

What is perhaps equally valuable, the group as a hard and fast rule always leaves time for discussion after the speaker has completed his or her presentation. “Tell me one key thing

you got out of today’s presentation that could make a positive change in your life,” group leader Dresher will pose. As members go around the room and within a minute’s time answer the question, an atmosphere of trust and bonding is built that can be challenging to find elsewhere in the members’ busy lives. So, four years later, the assembly built an atmosphere of support, camaraderie and candor that rivals any found elsewhere.

In fact, at one recent meeting on finding purpose in life, one participant during the closing recap quipped, “One thing I discovered is the importance of not judging each other, as I felt was done during our break off discussion earlier in the meeting.” So in the spirit of candor and mutual support, the group was able to work things out to a positive resolution.

“I believe we have a well-thought-out model here that could be valuable to many, many people,” Dresher adds as he reflects back on his group’s journey. “This just started as a few guys getting together to share their concerns over one of life’s most challenging transitions — that of retirement.”

Certainly there is plenty of research to back that observation. Study after study shows that our life spans can actually be extended not just by maintaining our physical health, but by having a sense of challenge, relationships, community and connection. In fact, one study by Allianz insurance company (2002) found that a person’s average life span can be increased by nine years if he or she maintains close friendships and family relationships.

Whether the Life Transition Group is a fountain of youth or not remains to be seen. But as every participant will attest, being part of such a dynamic, mutually supportive group has certainly made the journey that much more enjoyable.

Note: Ron Dresher, Brian Harris and the Life Transitions Group are not affiliated with Wells Fargo Advisors Financial Network.

Mitchell Kauffman provides wealth management services to corporate executives, business owners, professionals, independent women, and the affluent. He is one of only five financial advisors from across the U.S. named to Research magazine’s prestigious Advisor Hall of Fame in 2010, and among a select list of 100 over the past 20 years.

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