

# Life Planning Issues for Adults with ADHD





## BABY BOOMERS RETIRE! WHAT WOULD THE BEATLES DO NEXT?

by Wilma Fellman, MEd, LPC

*Life is very short and there's no time, for fussing and fighting  
my friend. I have always thought that it's a crime,  
so I will ask you once again: Try to see it my way, only time  
will tell if I am right or I am wrong. While you see it your  
way, there's a chance that we might fall apart before too long.  
We can work it out...*

—The Beatles

**T**hey remain one of the most beloved entertainers for the baby-boomer generation (and well beyond). These lyrics focus on many of life's all-important issues: brevity, the search for peace, tranquility, cooperation... and, if these are not found, the chance that all might fall apart before too long. The Beatles left us with hope that “we can work it out.” That's great news! But how?

### **Life is all about chapters**

More people than ever before are retiring from their major life's work and wondering what to do with “the rest of life.” Since many are leaving that main-chapter job at younger ages, it is predicted that this group will not be seen rocking on the porch waiting for its favorite game show to start. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that “due to the aging baby-boom generation, workers ages fifty-five and older are expected to make up over one-quarter of the labor force in 2022.” It appears this high-achieving group has no intention of portraying the old image of a retiree.

If we think about the lifespan in chapters, we see that we have five chapters, if we are lucky:

**CHAPTER ONE:** The Young Student

**CHAPTER TWO:** The Post High School Student

**CHAPTER THREE:** The Young Worker

**CHAPTER FOUR:** The Major Work Achiever

**CHAPTER FIVE:** The NEXT Chapter—The Post Work Selector

Most folks are used to planning for chapters one through four. Individuals with ADHD know all too well the necessity and value of careful planning for those first four chapters in order to get to that Major Work Achiever stage as comfortably and effectively as possible. But few give any thought or preparation to the fifth stage, “The Next Chapter: The Post Work Selector.”

**Grandma Moses was seventy-six when she did her first painting commanding \$3.00, while her later works went for over \$10,000.**

Many people with ADHD have spent years with tutors, coaches, medication, counseling, and strategies in order to maximize their strengths while minimizing their challenges. Yet all too often we totally ignore doing any planning, creating any support systems, and giving any thought to what will make the fifth chapter the best one yet! How then do we accomplish this goal?

As in chapters one through four, we need to undertake a systematic process of reevaluating ourselves, noting our current strengths and then mapping out a plan that will not only fill our time, but could be the frosting on the cake for our lives.

### Reevaluating ourselves

If we were wise early in our life—or had the benefit of others around us who were wise—we systematically gathered facts about ourselves. This information pointed us toward an area of life work that would allow us to shine and be the best version of ourselves. Without this self-awareness, we would have been stabbing in the dark at a target we didn't understand. With such knowledge under our belts, we would be self-aware enough to know what works for us and what doesn't—and (equally important) why. We would then be able to make better life and career choices and accomplish more of our goals.

A systematic approach to career and life planning would look like this:

1. Understand how our interests, skills, and accomplishments together match with certain job clusters in the World of Work.
2. Evaluate our personality, values and aptitudes in order to identify how these factors add into the layers in #1.
3. Identify how our early career dreams, energy/focus patterns and school/work habits add into the mix of #1 and #2.
4. Look at our success/challenge patterns to see how they have affected schooling and/or work histories. Identifying patterns (using #1–3) is essential to problem-solving and conquering the barriers.
5. Develop a concrete plan based upon the “hard data” of putting layers 1–4 on top of each other, with the knowledge that there is now sound reason to believe the plan will work.
6. Establish a plan for long-term support, identifying strategies, accommodations, and modifications needed for continued success.

Compare what you learn through this approach with the amount of data collected through the stab-in-the-dark approach. We can quickly realize how simple

the systematic approach is, and why it just plain works. Is it instant? No. It takes roughly eight to ten weeks to collect, synthesize, and understand what makes us tick. But the payoff is huge in terms of finding what really works for us.

### ADHD life is *also* about chapters

According to a WebMD article about ADHD in the workplace, “Keeping a job in today's competitive environment can be particularly difficult for people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In addition to having talent and drive, people are required to show excellent focus, attention to detail, speed, and organization. These crucial workplace skills may be challenging for the estimated 8-9 million American adults with ADHD.”

People with ADHD tend to have trouble with the following work-related areas:

- Time management
- Organization
- Listening and paying attention
- Following directions
- Procrastination
- Completing assignments
- Attending to details
- Getting to work on time
- Speaking in turn
- Sitting still
- Controlling emotions
- Anger

ADHD often leads to depression and low self-esteem. Constantly missing deadlines and being unable to complete your work on schedule can exacerbate these feelings.

We have volumes of materials on how to deal with the symptoms of ADHD in school and (more recently) in the workplace. But have we considered ADHD in the “retirement” years?





## The “NEXT” chapter

In addition to all the issues mentioned above, adults with ADHD will face new challenges in Chapter Five, such as:

- Lack of familiar routine
- Lost support systems (no secretary or administrative assistant)
- Loss of external goals (set by employer or innate in career tasks)
- Issues of spending more time with partner or spouse (ADHD or not)
- Lack of internal motivation
- Loss of self-esteem (*I used to be a . . . . .*)
- Loss of organization
- Sense of loss
- Depression/anxiety
- Well-meaning friends and relatives asking, “*What’s next?*”
- Grabbing at options that present themselves, without thought
- Focusing on potential health issues

How can we ensure that Chapter Five has a chance to be even more fulfilling than the previous chapter?

In an article called “ADHD and Creativity: A Double-Edged Study,” Rick Green highlights research by Holly A. White from the University of Memphis and Priti Shah of the University of Michigan. Their study indicated that “adults with ADHD showed higher levels of original creative thinking . . . and higher levels of real-world creative achievement, compared to adults

without ADHD.” In addition, we know that if a quarter of the workforce will be over fifty-five by 2020, it would follow that we will have creative individuals with ADHD remaining in the workforce well into their Next Chapter—who will also have reinvented themselves.

- Grandma Moses was seventy-six when she did her first painting commanding \$3.00, while her later works went for over \$10,000.
- Ronald Reagan was fifty-five years old when he took his first public office.
- Laura Ingalls Wilder, successful novelist, wrote her first novel at sixty-five.
- Taki Chiro Mori was a Tokyo economics professor until he “retired” at fifty-five to begin a new career in real estate that resulted in *Forbes* magazine naming him the Richest Man in the World—twice.

Now, what if some of these folks had had ADHD? How would that have impacted their choices?

If the systematic approach to career and life planning works for chapters one through four, would it not follow that it would enable folks retiring from their main career to begin their next chapter with a fresh look at what currently makes them tick? Wouldn’t taking the time to evaluate our strengths and challenges again result in better and more exciting choices?

Think of the endless possibilities open to a “retiring” individual with ADHD who, with his or her creativity and hard data goes on to prove Chapter Five the best one yet! Let’s get it right!

*Think of what you’re saying  
You can get it wrong and still you think that it’s all right  
Think of what I’m saying,  
We can work it out and get it straight, or say good night  
We can work it out,  
We can work it out. 🎧*

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For more than thirty years, **Wilma Fellman, MEd, LPC**, has been a career counselor specializing in attention deficit disorder, learning disabilities, and other challenges. She is the author of *The Other Me: Poetic Thoughts on ADD for Adults, Kids, and Parents* (Specialty Press/ADD Warehouse, 1997) and a contributor to *Understanding Women with ADHD* (Advantage Books, 2002). The second edition of her career development book, *Finding A Career that Works for You: A Step-by-Step Guide to Choosing a Career* (Specialty Press/ADD Warehouse, 2006), contains a special foreword by Richard Nelson Bolles, author of *What Color is Your Parachute?* Her newest offering is a partnership with the EDGE Foundation and Victoria Roche, PCC, in which she has developed a course in career services specialty training for seasoned ADHD coaches.

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