

Reinventing Yourself in Retirement Sounds Great. But It Isn't So Easy.

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Kathleen Kostrzewa knew when she retired from her job as an IT and business-development executive at Avon Products Inc. in 2015 that she wanted to pivot to a nonprofit where she could “do good work and give back.” An outplacement counselor she consulted told her she’d likely go through “multiple tries and not get it right at first,” she says.

The advice helped Ms. Kostrzewa, who is now 71, to experiment and accept that changing courses later in life is less a sprint than a slow jog with a lot of stumbles and retries along the way. She volunteered at a charter school, but soon quit because she spent more time waiting to be assigned students than helping anyone. She volunteered at a food pantry. After she and her husband moved to Los Angeles from Rhode Island three years ago, she worked at a program that teaches coding to children, leading an effort to recruit girls.

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One reason reinvention is so difficult is that many people go about it the wrong way. They think it’s something they can learn from reading books, or from filling out questionnaires to find what they are *really* passionate about. But that inevitably leads them down all sorts of misguided, frustrating paths.

Instead of diligently researching new options, Drexel University psychologist John Kounios advises people to get more sleep and dream, take walks in nature, go swimming or do any activity that’s fun and allows their minds to wander. “That’s when you tend to have crazy, wild thoughts, an a-ha moment,” says Mr. Kounios who has studied creativity. “Finding a second act is a form of problem solving, but to discover it you have to get away from analytic thinking.”

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