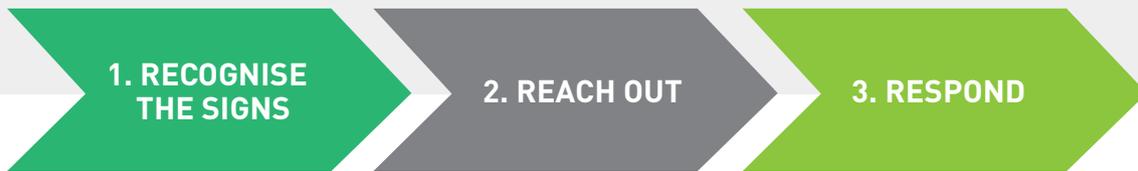




There are plenty of myths about retirement out there. Having informative conversations about retirement, as employees plan their transition out of the workforce, can help dispel common myths, whilst also helping prepare for life beyond work.

This conversation guide provides some pointers and questions based on the key elements of the 'retirement planning framework'. By using these questions along with the conversation framework, managers can be better prepared and more confident in having retirement discussions with their employees.



1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

These are all potential signs, and the presence of them does not automatically mean someone is thinking of retiring.

We need to use our judgment to handle these conversations respectfully.

- Age (not the only factor, but can still be a sign).
- Changes in demeanor or behavior.
- Requests for flexible work or extended leave (or hoarding leave).
- Comments about winding down.
- Purchasing 'retirement toys'.
- Lifestyle changes, such as a spouse retiring.

Remember that retirement transitions can be either anticipated or unanticipated.

Anticipated retirement occurs at one's preferred time, is planned and is mostly within their control. Conversely, unanticipated retirement occurs not at one's preferred time, is unplanned and often not in their control.

Unanticipated retirement may occur due to declining health, redundancy, or caring responsibilities and is often more difficult to come to terms with and plan for.

Either way, having conversations about retirement will help make the transition to retirement more manageable for employees.

Notes:

2. REACH OUT

The purpose of a retirement conversation is not to get older employees ‘out the door,’ or to impose your own ideas about retirement onto them.

Rather the purpose of the conversation is to provide the framework and tools for employees to plan their own retirement.

When preparing for a retirement conversation, carefully consider your assumptions and mindset going into it. If you seem genuinely interested in your team members’ plans and goals the conversation will be more productive.

If you feel awkward about having the conversation, or think your employee might take it the wrong way, consider ways to normalise it. Perhaps organise a retirement related event for the team, such as a seminar by the organisation’s default super fund, or a [Retiring Well](#) presentation from SuperFriend. In addition, make ‘checking in’ the norm—having career conversations with all your people helps make retirement conversations less confronting.

See the ‘Late Career’ resources for tips on how to have more general career conversations.

Notes:

3. RESPOND

EMOTIONS FIRST

Retirement can be an emotional time for people. They can be excited, worried, exhausted, relieved, scared, angry, sad, or something else!

They can even be feeling a mixture of positive and negative emotions. A retirement conversation needs to start with the emotions, because generally people aren’t in the headspace to plan anything until their feelings are acknowledged.

Recognising and acknowledging emotions doesn’t need to be hard. Listen carefully and with genuine care to what they say. You can even ask them how they’re feeling.

The trick is not to comfort them or rationalise with them, simply name the emotion. Say something like:

- “You sound a bit worried about what might happen.”
- “Wow, there’s a lot going on for you, how does that make you feel?”
- “I can hear how excited you are about your retirement.”

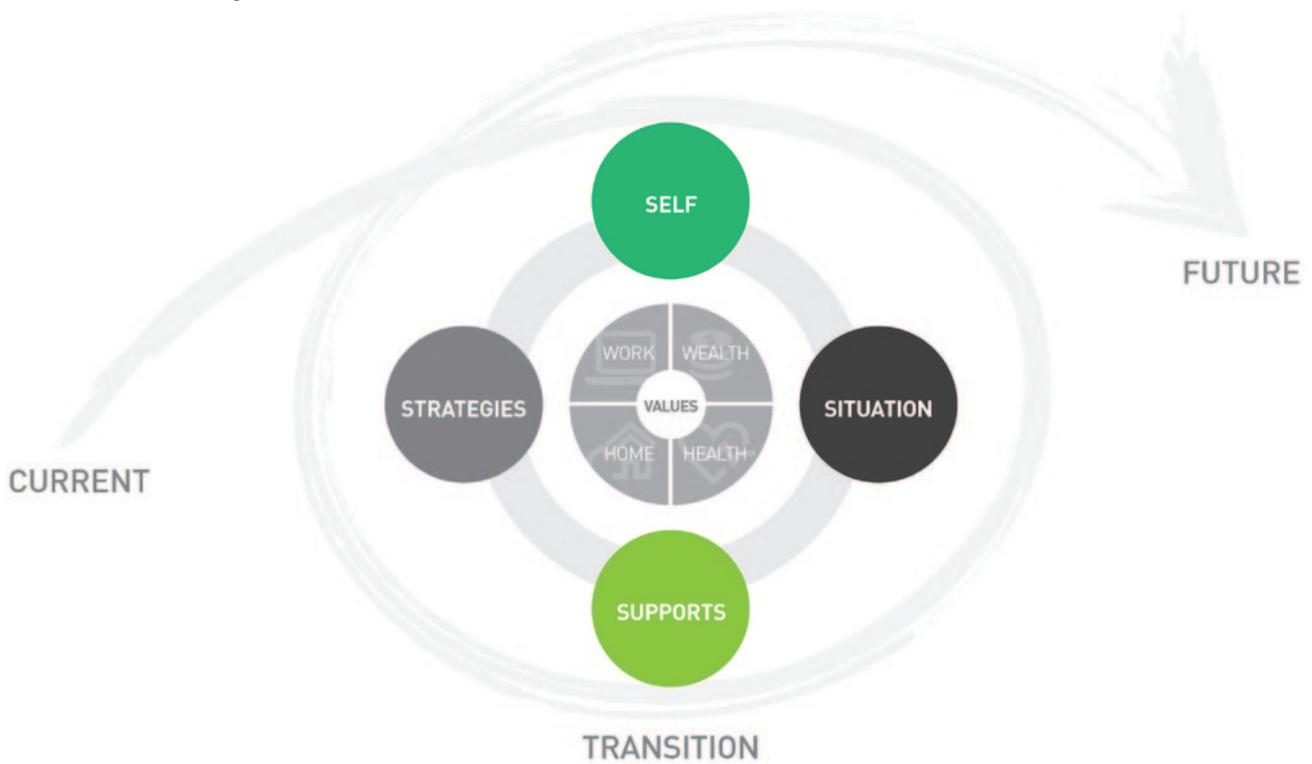
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THEN PLAN

Once your employee feels that you really hear them and appreciate how they're feeling, you can move to the planning part of the conversation.

Transitioning to retirement requires consideration of numerous factors across different areas of an employee's life and is best navigated with a plan. As a manager, you can provide your people with the confidence and tools to develop a transition to retirement plan.

The diagram below depicts the key elements of a retirement plan that are useful to consider throughout the transition.



WELLBEING

At the centre of this diagram is Work, Wealth, Home and Health—these are factors which need to be anchored in Values.

Helping people to find what's important to them in each of these areas helps them make decisions about how long to stay in the workforce and also provide a bridge to retirement.

By reflecting more wholistically on these elements, people can work out what things they want to be doing now and into retirement.

See the employee worksheets on each of 'work', 'wealth', 'home', 'health' and 'values' for additional support in considering these elements of life and wellbeing.

Notes:

4S TRANSITION PLANNING

The next layer in the retirement diagram is: self, situation, supports and coping strategies. According to transition expert Nancy Schlossberg, they are central to a transition plan.

As a manager, your job isn't to coach your people through this planning exercise, but to help raise their awareness and provide tools to support them. Employees can use the 'Retirement Worksheet' for further guidance on creating a transition plan.

SELF

When having a conversation about transitioning to retirement, encourage them to think about their values.

Our values reflect who we want to be as a person, what we want our lives to look like and what is important to us.

This can be a very personal thing, so there is no expectation that they share their values with you. But hopefully, by introducing the concept of values into the conversation, they feel able to think about this by themselves or with a friend or partner.

Questions to ask to encourage a reflection of **values** include:

- What does retirement mean to you?
- Why are you thinking about retirement?
- What are some of your hopes for retirement?

SITUATION

In a retirement conversation, you want to encourage employees to consider their situation—including their work, wealth, home, and health—factors that will influence their decision on remaining in the workforce as well as help them plan what their retirement could look like.

Questions related to **work** include:

- When/ what date would you want to retire?
- What needs to happen to prepare you to leave work?
- What do you need if you continue to work?

Questions related to **wealth** include:

- Have you reviewed your financial position?
- Have you created a retirement budget?
- Do you have access to financial knowledge specific to retirement (e.g. Government websites related to pension eligibility and concession cards).

Note that finances are a personal topic, and it is not the job of a manager to provide financial advice. It may be within a managers capacity to direct employees to relevant financial services (e.g. Moneysmart.gov.au).

Questions related to **home** include:

- Have you considered your hobbies and the lifestyle you would like to have in retirement?
- Have you considered your family situation?
- Have you discussed your retirement ideas and intentions with significant others?

Questions related to **health** include:

- Have you considered your physical and mental wellbeing?
- Have you booked in a check-up with your GP?
- Have you thought about ways to maintain/ improve your health and wellbeing during retirement?



Notes:

SUPPORTS

When undertaking a big life transition, it is important to have an awareness of our support networks.

That way, we can ensure that we get the right kind of support from the right kind of people. Sometimes a lot of support comes from work, so as a manager you want to encourage employees to think about their bigger support network.

Again, you do not need answers to these questions, but it can be useful to think about:

- Relationships with family and close friends.
- Friends in the neighbourhood or through social activities (e.g. sport, clubs).
- Wider networks of family and friends.
- Professionals that provide specific support (e.g. doctors, lawyers).

COPING STRATEGIES

When having a conversation about retirement, it is important to note that the transition can be a difficult time for some, as they let go of their former work-identity and adapt to a new way of life.

Discussing previous life transitions, and the coping strategies that assisted in getting through previously difficult times, can help to reduce stress associated with retirement.

Questions related to **coping strategies**:

- Think about a previous life transition—what did you do to get through?
- Can you change your current or future situation, can you make it better?
- Can you change the way you see your retirement; can you reframe the transition?
- What can you do to reduce stress?

Notes:

RESOURCES

After having a conversation about retirement with employees it may be appropriate to share informative resources so they can do some research.

Alternatively, you may wish to consult these resources yourself in order to be better informed of the information and services out there on retirement.

These are some resources that you may find helpful:

The [AWR website](#) is full of useful articles, blogs and resources on helping employees navigate late-career and retirement.

See what services your organisations EAP offer.

[The Fair Work Australia website](#) has useful information and resources regarding workplace rights and obligations

Talking to a psychologist can help people navigate uncertainty and overcome challenges. If you or your employee wants to speak to a professional, contact a GP or use the [APS find a psychologist website](#).

[Moneysmart.gov.au](#) has useful and unbiased information about money and finances.

[Overwhelmed: Coping with life's ups and downs](#) by Nancy Schlossberg explains the 4S transition model in detail.