



*From the library of The Identity Circle — Insights and ideas about leading, managing and living through the lens of identity.*

## ***Breaking the Code***

### ***Synopsis:***

'Free to be me' — finally! — is often the unspoken mantra of people contemplating or entering retirement. The idea that, now, you can be whatever you've always wanted to be, or do whatever you've always wanted to do, occupies your thoughts and dreams. Such thoughts, however, often prove to be as misguided as they are seductive. In truth, you *can't* be anything you want to be in life — yet, you have more potential than you know, and that potential resides in your identity. Indeed, unlocking your personal 'identity code' may be the key to a happy, fulfilling retirement.

## RETIREMENT

# Breaking the code

*Unlocking your personal 'identity code' may be the key to a happy, fulfilled retirement*

BY LARRY ACKERMAN

"(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" by the Rolling Stones is one of the most iconic songs of the baby boom era. In college, it might as well have been my theme song. As 76 million of us boomers head toward retirement (whatever that is) "Satisfaction" may say as much about our hopes for the next chapter of our lives, as it does about our nostalgia for anthems of sex, drugs and rock 'n roll.

For boomers, retirement might be called a second life. It certainly can be called a second chance—a chance to finally know who you really are, a chance to find work that is deeply fulfilling, a chance to make the march through midlife more gratifying, satisfying and meaningful.

My parents, like most parents, often told me that I could be anything I wanted to be, as long as I worked hard and never gave up. All too often they also told me what they thought I should be. Despite their good intentions, their advice doesn't work. The idea that I am, or you or anyone else is at liberty to pick whatever path in life you want is a myth. I call it the myth of personal freedom. It is the unspoken agony of the modern person; the popular, but misguided belief that ignores the fact that life has order, and that that order bears heavily upon your choices.

The order I am talking about is built into us in the form of a code—the identity code. Much like our biological genetic code, our identity code forms at the moment of conception, providing a complete map of how we, as human beings, are designed to function, and how we are supposed to live, when we are living according to who we truly are.

By deciphering your identity code, you will be able,

finally, to understand your purpose and shape your life accordingly. Clarify your identity—the unique characteristics that reveal your potential for creating value in the world—and you will be able to write the next chapter of your life with complete confidence in terms of what you want to have happen and how to make it so.

### Mapping your passions

So how do you find your identity code? How can you see, with greater clarity, what your real passions are? Begin by asking your self a series of eight questions. Taken in sequence, these questions form the Identity Mapping® process. The questions are: Who am I? What makes me special? Is there a pattern to my life? Where am I going? What is my gift? Who can I trust? What is my message? Will my life be rich?

The answers to these questions provide the clues you need to decipher your identity. They present the "whole" picture of who you are capable of becoming as an individual. At first glance, they may appear similar to any number of other life-shaping questions people ask themselves in the course of their lives. But they aren't arbitrary. They come from a series of eight natural laws—the Laws of Identity—which govern our lives like clockwork.

For instance, to answer the question, Who am I?, you must define yourself as separate from all others. In simple terms, before you can know who you are, you must first know who you are not. From an identity perspective, what you seek in separation is independence, the ability to think and act on your own and in your own best interests, despite what others may expect of you.

Another example: To answer the question, What is my gift?, you need to follow the signs of joy. Within each of us is an overarching drive that cries out to be developed and exercised. Call it a gift, a purpose, or a passion. It is that irrepressible need we have that captures our imagination and urges us forward. It is something that we are compelled to do, simply because of who we are. Your identity is your gift to the world. Follow its call.

When you decipher your identity code, you will discover many wonderful secrets, strengths you weren't aware you had, passions that have lingered just out of sight, and courage that has simmered just below the surface of your skin. You will not only come out stronger, you will come out larger—larger in heart, in influence, and in your capacity to love and be loved.

You will find the right friends. You will marry (or remarry) smarter. You will discover the right line of work or field of study, and the place to practice it. You will be better parents and grandparents. You may even live longer. Crack your identity code and you will arrive at a place where you are filled with passion, conviction, and serenity—a place you will recognize, finally, as home.

As much as you may love Mick and the Stones, nothing compares to the satisfaction you will get when you live your life through the lens of your identity. ■

*Larry Ackerman is a leading authority on organizational and personal identity and the author of "The Identity Code: The 8 Essential Questions for Finding Your Purpose and Place in the World." (Random House, 2006) Contact him at [www.theidentitycode.com](http://www.theidentitycode.com).*

