Retirement planning late in the game

While your friends were paying down their mortgages and building a nest egg, you were sinking your savings into travelling the world. Or perhaps money was tight and-after putting the kids through school, car payments and daily living expenses-there just never seemed like enough money around to think about a retirement fund. Whatever the reason, many people find themselves inching closer and closer to their 'golden years' without a concrete financial plan of action. Instead of throwing all your hopes into a lottery ticket, put yourself on a progressive retirement path by:

Establishing what you'll need. Before carving out a financial plan, you'll need to take some time to consider what you envision for your retirement. Ask yourself:

- Whether you plan on taking early retirement
- If you want to work beyond 65
- What you intend on doing once retired. *Will you sell your home and downsize? Travel every winter? Move in with the kids? Volunteer?*
- About the kind of lifestyle you'd like to have and the monthly income you'll require to comfortably live in retirement.

Starting NOW. The sooner you make retirement planning a priority the better. Forget philosophizing about why you've waited so long and instead get busy. Start by paying yourself first. Arrange for your bank to directly withdraw a fixed amount of your paycheck on payday to put towards a retirement fund (note: the later in life you're starting, the larger the percentage of income you'll want to try and save). You're less likely to miss the money and more likely to stick with saving if it's directly removed from your account monthly or bi-weekly. Remember: the longer you're able to invest, the more time you'll have to allow these investments to grow.

Consulting a professional. A financial planner or advisor can review your assets, estate and liabilities and discuss your vision of retirement. He or she will work with you to create a longer-term savings and investment strategy that suits your tolerance for risk (note: generally the closer you are to retirement the less risky you'll want your investments to be) and get you to a comfortable retirement. If you're nervous about finding a compatible financial planner or advisor, get referrals from trusted friends and family or talk to your bank.

Boosting your retirement contributions. According to a recent report, 47 per cent of those polled aren’t contributing to a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP), one of the most popular tools for saving for retirement. Get the most out of your bonus or overtime pay and your retirement, by throwing that money straight into your RRSP. Look for other creative ways to maximize your RRSP contributions. One person's junk is another's treasure so sell those old golf clubs, stereo or handbags and put the proceeds in the retirement kitty. Giving as much as possible to your RRSP now will minimize your tax burden, maximize interest earned on that money and get you closer to your goal of a financially stress-free retirement.