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Put the Needle on the Record

Career Development



I'm listening to vinyl records again. Last weekend, I recommissioned my turntable after more than two decades in storage. I'd taken it to the shop a couple of years back for a new stylus, belt, and whatever passes for a tune-up among those who know how to do such things, but I returned it to its storage box. At the time, we shared our home with a cat that would very likely have made it his ninth life's work to destroy it; the cat has since passed, and we relocated to a new home with more space to pursue such interests.

That move was nearly two years ago, and I'd been meaning to unbox the old audio equipment the whole time, but I kept putting it off because there was always something more "responsible" that needed my attention. There were (and still are, if I'm being honest) boxes to unpack, pictures to hang, closets to organize, and the endless stream of minor fixes and improvements all homeowners endure. I kept telling myself I would set up the stereo, and do a whole host of other fun things, once I finished the chores.

Last week, I also played my first round of golf since sometime before the move to a new city and job in 2017. Early in 2017, my father had given me a new driver to replace the comically unhittable one I'd carried around since the 90s; before last week, I hadn't even found the time to visit a driving range to try it out. I was delighted to discover I can actually make credible contact with the ball with this "new" club, and had a great time with my GC and a couple of attorneys from a local firm reacquainting myself with the game. Much like the turntable set-up, I told myself I'd make time to try out the new club once I got "settled" in the new job, city, and home. Had the attorneys who invited

me only proposed generally that we get together or some golf soon, I'm sure that "soon" would still not have come.

A couple of weekends ago, we entertained my father, his wife, his three sisters, and one of my cousins in our home for a long weekend. The original plan for that weekend was that only my father and stepmother were coming, but he toyed with the idea of a family reunion of sorts for the better part of the past decade. I had been generally supportive of the idea, but hadn't done anything to help make that happen. Honestly, it sounded like an enormous administrative headache with little hope of success. My extended family is spread as far across the continental states as the map will permit, and their means to make a long-distance trip for a visit are varied, to say the least.

Even so, when my dad asked if we could give it a try that weekend, I readily agreed. To my surprise, everything fell into place. I had a delightful time catching up with everyone, some of whom I hadn't seen or spoken to in several years (I also learned it's foolish to assume my 90-year-old aunt wouldn't bring her "A" game when a game of "Cards Against Humanity" broke out), and we all agreed to make the gathering an annual one.

So, what do listening to scratchy old records, playing golf on a workday, and being surprised by a nonagenarian's street cred have to do with one another — not to mention with small law practice? I've written previously about my fondness for the seventh of Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Successful People, which is "Sharpen the Saw." I generally think about that in terms of taking the time to learn, to practice, to exercise, to rest, even when one's calendar and to-do list are shouting that there is work to do, and therefore no time for those things. Considering my experiences of recent weeks, I realize I have been approaching that too narrowly.

The element that ties each of these anecdotes together is the single regret I have about all of them — I could have enjoyed each experience a year or more ago, had I prioritized differently. What's more, the enjoyment I felt sharpened my saw; I came away from each experience with renewed energy and enthusiasm for tackling life's daily challenges, both at work and at home. What do you have on your list of things you're not letting yourself do until you first take care of other pressing matters? Make a plan now to do at least one of those things. Overcome the urge to just tell yourself you will do it "soon"; make it for January, and see if giving yourself that experience, and even the anticipation of it, doesn't help you come into next year with more of the energy you need to thrive.

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