Dealing with the Stress of Retirement

Community

Career Development

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So, how’s retirement?

Yes, you read the title correctly. Any life change involves stress, whether it be eustress (good) or distress (bad). Stress can take a toll on a person physically, mentally, and emotionally. But, at least for me, being prepared for stress helps to lessen the impact.

I retired on June 30, 2024, and I’m asked on a regular basis: “What's it like to be retired?” Some days I might answer that it’s nice to not need to set an alarm, to do whatever I want (or nothing), to not have any work-related stress.

Other days I will tell you, quite honestly, that I miss that stress. As an analogy, imagine you’re driving down an interstate about 70 miles an hour, then you exit to go to your local mall, on Black Friday. In other words, you go from 70 mph to about 5 mph in a snap of the fingers. I’ve been going 70 mph for as long as I can remember, and I’ve been working since I was 14. Even when I was a stay-at-home mom from 1980-1989 (undoubtedly one of the hardest, most rewarding jobs in the world), I worked part time jobs.

I had prepared for retirement, or at least I thought I had. Financially I was ready (more about that in a bit). In addition to my non-profit boards and bar association work, I had devised a daily schedule that involved reading, gardening, working out, studying French, and writing.

Reality: For almost the entire month of July I slept late every day, watched TV, worked out a bit, but stayed in my pajamas until after noon. I just didn’t feel like doing anything (plus it was too hot to

garden — if you've ever been to Tennessee in the middle of summer you know). I lacked motivation to do anything, which is not my normal state.

In retrospect, I was depressed.

Then, I went to the ABA meeting for a week at the end of July. I got up early every day, dressed in something other than my old Phillies t-shirt and shorts, put on makeup, and spent the day chatting with other attorneys. I was excited and energized!

The experience made me realize that no matter how much I had planned, I had not planned on feeling unmoored from who I had identified as for the past 25 years — an attorney in a position of responsibility who now faced the question "who am I, really?"

Quite honestly, I missed being "important" and being regarded as an expert who could fix problems. After some introspection, I realized that I'm still an attorney, but now I have the freedom to use my skills in the way I've always wanted to use them — to help others, to give back to the community, and maybe go in a different career direction. That realization helped me feel more comfortable about being retired.

I also faced losing my sense of my work community. I had worked for the same company, in various capacities, for over 25 years. With only 150 employees (and having been HR director for a three-year stint) I knew just about everyone and had what I thought were close friendships.

What I learned quickly is that once you are no longer with a company, those relationships drift away. It's inevitable as the common denominator that brought you together is gone. It can be a very lonely feeling. In fact, I grieved for my "former life."

Final stressor — watching too much television and reading the news almost compulsively. It was a stressful election year (and it hasn't let up), and I allowed myself to be sucked into the negative energy. It also led to a nightly glass (or two) of wine, which didn't help with my weight loss goals.

ACC Members: Download the **Retirement Checklist for In-house Counsel**

Time for a new plan

Realizing that structure makes me happy, I decided to go back to my original plan but with tweaks.

First, I decided that movement every day is non-negotiable. Whether it's getting outside to walk with the dogs, working out with my Peloton app doing weights or yoga, or going to Pilates class, if I don't move I don't feel my best.

Second, I've started to focus on eating healthy foods in season, with as few ingredients as possible in a recipe or in prepared food to help me lose the pounds I gained during those first months (which were added on top of the pandemic weight gain). I make sure to take time to meditate every day and engage in creative writing at least three times a week.

Finally, I've accomplished a goal I set for myself several years ago: I completed my mediator training and will be starting a new part-time practice as a mediator in June, which will include pro bono mediations for Legal Aid. I set the alarm on weekdays for no later than 8 and start my day by reading, filling the bird feeders, and playing with the dogs.

I enjoy retirement, but I still miss the work stress… sometimes.

ACC Members: Join the Small Law Department Network's **Brown Bag Lunch**
An Informal Discussion on Being In Transition (June 30, 2025)

Avoiding financial stress

One major source of retirement stress is financial stress. If you take nothing else away from this article, please take this to heart: If you haven't started saving for retirement, START NOW!

It doesn't matter where you are in your career; in fact, the earlier you start the better off you will be later in your life. If you have an employer that offers a 401(k) or equivalent, start contributing to it each paycheck no matter how small the amount. If your employer offers a match up to a certain percentage, try to at least put that much in and increase it every year as you (hopefully) earn more money.

Remember the time value of money: Your money is worth more now than it will be in the future because you can invest it and watch it grow. Once you start saving you won't miss that money, and by the time you're ready to retire you should have a nice amount to have the retirement you dream of.

But even if you're in your forties or fifties, it isn't too late. I started funding my 401(k) when I was 38 (when I started with the company). Another tip: Find a financial advisor you trust and work with that person to plan now for your future. You'll be glad that you did when you're in your 60s.

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What to do in your next chapter

Remember in the movie *Napoleon Dynamite*, when the kid on the bus asks Napoleon: "What are you gonna do today, Napoleon?" Napoleon's answer: "Whatever I feel like I wanna do. Gosh!"

That's pretty much my answer as well. I have time to spend with family and friends. I am still very involved in bar association work, and I sit on a few non-profit boards. I travel without the worry of constantly checking email, have rediscovered my joy of creative writing, and I have more time for pro bono work which affords the opportunity to learn about new areas of the law. As mentioned earlier, I am starting a mediation practice this summer, and I haven't given up on my dream of owning a

wine/coffee/tea bar with meeting space for book clubs and bridal showers.

I now tell people that my “retirement” is really a sabbatical of undetermined duration. I’ve never been more content or felt more fulfilled.

Whatever your plans for retirement, and whenever you plan to start your next chapter, know that the life change will bring stress. I hope for you that it’s the good kind of stress and that, when the time comes, you enjoy the retirement you’ve worked so hard to attain.

> Another tip: Find a financial advisor you trust and work with that person to plan now for your future. You’ll be glad that you did when you’re in your 60s.

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Sherie Edwards

Former Vice President of Corporate and Legal (Retired)

SVMIC

Sherie Edwards retired from her role as Vice President of Corporate and Legal with SVMIC on June 30, 2024. She joined SVMIC in November of 1998 as a Claims Attorney, and was promoted to Senior Claims Attorney in 2003, Assistant Vice President of Government Relations and Compliance in January of 2011, and Vice President of Corporate and Legal in January of 2015.

Edwards received her Bachelor of Science degree in Management and Human Relations from

Trevecca Nazarene University in 1991, her Juris Doctorate degree from the Nashville School of Law in 1996, and her Master of Business Administration from the Owen Graduate School of Business at Vanderbilt University in August 2012. She is licensed to practice law in Tennessee and before the U.S. Supreme Court and is a Rule 31 Listed Mediator with the Tennessee Supreme Court.

Edwards is active in professional and civic organizations and serves on several boards including: President-Elect of the Nashville Bar Association; Board member, Tennessee Justice Center; Secretary of the Board of Sister Cities Nashville; NCBP Executive Council; President-Elect of the Harry Phillips Inn of Court; Past President of the Tennessee Bar Association; past Chair of the ABA TIPS Medicine and Law committee; and past Chair of the MPLA Corporate Counsel Section. She is a Fellow of the American, Tennessee, and Nashville Bar Foundations, a recipient of the Jonathan S. Silber Network Member of the Year award of the Association of Corporate Counsel (2018) and has been recognized by her peers as one of Nashville Business Journal's Best of the Bar—Corporate Counsel in 2013, 2014, and 2017-2024.

She speaks frequently to bar association groups on attorney wellbeing and topics of interest to corporate counsel and has been published in the *ACC Docket* and various TBA and ABA publications.

Sherie has three grown children, two grandsons (and a granddaughter due to make her world debut in July) and two crazy Bichons.