

Celebrating the Seasons of Our Life: A Lawyer's Winter

Part 4 of a 4 part series on the seasons of our lives as lawyers
by Susan Ann Koenig

You may think you are too far away from the winter of your legal career to read about the final season. Think again. As Stephen Covey, author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, recommended, "Begin with the end in mind."

Whether you are a recent grad or drawing on your retirement benefits, pondering and planning how you want the final chapter of your life to read merits attention.

Even as a young lawyer, I appreciated the Omaha Bar Association's memorial service for attorneys who died the preceding year. Back then I knew few of them personally. Three decades later, I know many.

This annual ceremony is a time for me to reflect on those in our proud profession made their work and their lives matter. I see the people they impacted and the qualities they lived. Even if one of them gave me heartburn as opposing counsel, I realize now their lives had been much bigger than that single moment when tempers flared in the heat of the courtroom battle.

Susan Ann Koenig



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Dedication. Brilliance. Compassion. Courage. Tenacity. Creativity. I could see them all. Their lives inspire thoughtful consideration of how I might be remembered at the end of my life as a lawyer. We are never too young or too old to begin this reflection.

Taking Care of You

As we age, we experience more serious illness among our close friends and family. We are also more likely to face these challenges ourselves. We have a more compelling awareness of the impact of stress, eating, and exercise on our well-being.

Early in our career, we have the powerful and perennial excuse of not enough time. We may be surprised to discover that even with our children and book of business grown, we still hear ourselves say, "I don't have time."

The years of living the lawyer life can leave us with unhealthy habits that are hard to shake. We may work, eat, or drink too much. We may exercise, rest, or sleep too little.

If we do not develop healthy habits, our body will eventually force us to. We don't exercise and we find ourselves in physical therapy for a broken hip. We don't take time to slowly eat whole foods and instead we spend time at doctor appointments managing our stomach problems. Our drinking is more than it should be, and we find ourselves facing a DWI.

It's never too late to start to live a life of better self care. Start small. Start with support. Simply start.

People First

The more people we watch leave this earth before us, the more aware we become of how fleeting life can be. We attend the funeral of a fellow lawyer and we leave with the thought,



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"I wish I had known her better." Investing in our relationships becomes more important than ever as we become more aware of just how fragile life is.

Consider how you will look back on your relationships. How will you be described as a parent, a partner, a friend? Is there a relationship you have neglected in the past? Is there a grudge it's time to release? Do you want to be spending more time with grandchildren?

If we are not mindful, the office will take a real toll on our relationships. Practicing law can be greedy and grueling when it comes to time. Attending your child's school program, having lunch with an old friend, or cooking dinner with your family can feel like a luxury.

Who matters in your life? Are you giving your relationships the time and attention they deserve? Are there conversations with important people in your life that you have been putting off? Are there friendships that you need to let go of? Is it time to plan that long-deferred family vacation?

If you are no longer going to the office each day, consider taking the initiative to get together with the people you enjoyed while you were. Just because you no longer put on a suit each day doesn't mean you can't continue to enjoy the good company of your favorite colleagues.

In the winter of our careers, we realize that we want to take

care of our relationships while we still have the privilege.

A Closer Look at Succession

At this stage you may have completed your succession plan for your practice, be carrying it out, or saying, "Yikes! I better get one!" If you don't have one, the need is now more urgent.

Implementing your succession plan may take longer than you think. Remember that last home improvement project you thought you could wrap up before the football game started that ended up taking a month? I took my first coaching course in 2001 and started coaching in 2003. But it was five years later before I wrapped up my cases and looked at becoming of counsel with my firm.

Most of us are not all that crazy about considering, let alone discussing, our mortality. Any estate planning attorney can tell you of the challenges of getting a client to finalize their documents.

The desire to postpone succession planning is normal. I hold an intention to be a centenarian, so it's easy for me to think I have decades before I need to worry about what happens to the firm should death come suddenly.

The truth is, a succession plan is not for us. It is for our clients, our co-workers, and our families. After all, depending upon your spiritual beliefs, when we die we will either be dust in

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the earth, a spirit in heaven, or inhabiting a new physical form. It will be up to others to deal with the unresolved matters we left behind.

Succession planning is an act of consideration for those you care about. It reduces the confusion and conflict that may arise in your absence. You have spent your entire career taking care of people who mattered to you. Be sure that you have a plan in place so that this does not change upon your death.

Continuing to Make a Contribution

Professionals often have a lot of their identity tied up in their career. For decades people ask you what you do for a living and you reply, "I'm a lawyer." Despite being the object of a plethora of jokes, there continues to be a certain status that we enjoy by virtue of our vocation.

When we stop being lawyers, who are we?

If we no longer practice law, it does not mean we stop making a contribution. Indeed, for many this final season may when many have their greatest impact. We have more experience, knowledge, and skills than ever.

Ask yourself how you will continue to make a difference. You might use your legal background by teaching, mentoring, or volunteering. Or perhaps there is a passion you set aside long ago that you would be delighted to undertake now. Whether it is playing the saxophone, growing a garden, or writing your first novel, you still have gifts to share with the world.

For a great article on encore careers, revisit Roy Ginsburg's article on "Second Acts" in the March 2008 issue of *The*

Nebraska Lawyer.

Where Does All the Time Go?

Many lawyers spend much of their lives wishing they had more time. As our careers advance, this longing can remain. The limit to the number of hours in a day and now the number of years in our lives come into sharper focus. No matter how much or how little time remains, we want to use it wisely.


Inventory the way you use the time you have. Whether you work full-time, scaled back, or turned in your keys to the office, pay attention to where the hours of your life are going.

How much of your day is spent doing what you love? How much time do you devote to giving to others? How many hours are spent on activities to fill up your day that don't provide meaning or enjoyment?


Ask yourself, "What do I want to have less of in my life? What do I want to have more of?" Once you know these answers, you see more clearly the life you want. This is the first step to setting goals to bring it into reality.

Always in Gratitude

As in every season of our life, gratitude is guaranteed to shift our perspective into appreciation. As lawyers, we have been gifted with tremendous education, a chance to use our skills for good, and opportunities to impact lives. No matter what the state of our health, we are still here and able to breathe, take in the beauty around us, and make a difference each day.


Here's wishing a celebration of every season of your life. 

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