

This article is one of four reflections on retirement written by former AALL member Jean Holcomb, the retired director of King County Law Library, Seattle, WA. Her articles were originally posted on the blog of the Virginia Association of Law Libraries (VAL). She has given the Encore Caucus permission to post them on our webpage.

Time Management for the Retiree

By Jean Holcomb

When you walk out of your library office for the last time, you will leave many things behind. No more worries about budget negotiations, technology upgrades, or space planning. You will take with you skills built over your working career. In particular, you will find that your time management and negotiation techniques will play key roles in building a fulfilling life after work.

Why do time management and negotiation skills continue to play important roles? Isn't life in retirement just six Saturdays and a Sunday? Why worry about how you use your time in a new world without deadlines?

For most retirees who leave a structured work environment, the last thing they expect to find challenging will be how to budget their time. After the first weeks filled with planning for that dream vacation, starting a much anticipated home project, or just sitting with your feet up, reality strikes. Gone are three day weekends, days off for conferences, and personal leave days.

Soon the "six Saturdays" challenge appears. Without the comfortable sense of routine a schedule brings, without the structure of your day at the library, how will you characterize the days of the week? Much depends on your personal orientation on the glass half-full meter. Is every day now a Monday? Would that be a good or bad thing?

At first, dealing with the challenges brought by a new time frame without structure may feel disconcerting. Don't rush to fill this vacuum. Resist the temptation to replicate the rigidity of your work life routine. Understand that a balanced schedule includes time for a wide variety of activities.

Take time to let your post-professional life circadian rhythms develop. Listen to your internal clock to discover the best time of day for special tasks requiring concentration. Through trial and error figure out when you're most comfortable including daily exercise activities. Recognize signals that tell you it's time to slow down and recharge. Reap the restorative benefits of a mid- day nap. Insert time to put your feet up and enjoy a book. Practice mindful decision making.

Recognize that not every minute needs to be filled. Accepting non-action as a legitimate use of time may take practice. Having a guilt-free day off may be especially challenging when family members have a lower threshold for inactivity. Consider instituting the idea of a rainy-day pass good for time off from daily routine even without the rain. A day without structure brings with it the time to let the mind wander.

The role played by reflective thinking in planning and reassessment activities continues throughout our lives. The change from a work focus to a more personal orientation doesn't devalue the importance of finding time to reflect. While the process of reflective thinking won't change, we may face a challenge in

creating an environment conducive to such thought. With no office door to close, be creative in finding an “away” space at home for uninterrupted thinking time. In our family the long standing joke is that my bed is my office. When papers and a yellow legal pad appear on the cover, family know it’s time to tip-toe away.

For most of us, how we develop our daily routines will not be a unilateral decision. The interests and needs of the family members and friends in our lives will impact our time planning. Retirement offers opportunities to renegotiate how we apportion family tasks. Decisions made in the past about tasks like grocery shopping, bill paying, yard work, and meal preparation stand ready for reevaluation based on non-work priorities. Not who has the time, but who has the interest might become the determining factor in task ownership.

Changes in the technology that surrounds us once we retire play a role in how we accomplish tasks. Keeping up with new operating systems for everything from home entertainment systems and phones, to cameras and computers opens opportunities to maximize task completion. For those of us who relied heavily on in-house library technical support to bridge the steep new technology learning curve caisson, smooth mastery often depends on building informal technology safety nets of family, friends, community college courses and home based trial and error. I’ve learned that the old saying about teaching an old dog new tricks exists for a reason. At the same time, the feeling of satisfaction that comes with mastery never grows old.

Even while new technologies such as smart phones give us the option to never be unconnected from the greater world around us, learning to “turn off” phones, instant messaging, and email remain just as important today as when we worked in the library. Establish personal parameters about reading and responding to emails and text messages. Then share those parameters with those with whom you are in regular contact. Setting boundaries in this fashion sets expectations and avoids conflict and miscommunication.

As you take the first steps to build a daily routine, don’t rush to fill all of the vacuum left by an empty schedule. Don’t immediately commit to time constraining projects. Take at least six months to decompress and design a new time management outline that matches your new reality. Recognize this outline as a first draft that will evolve as you explore new interest and focus on new projects. Never forget the importance of building in a reward mechanism for project completions. Right now I’m looking forward to exploring a new mystery author’s first book and baking a peach mascarpone tart.