

A festive banner with the word "RETIREMENT" in white capital letters on dark blue pennants. The banner is strung with gold and white triangular bunting and gold confetti. The background is a light beige with a subtle pattern of gold dots and swirls.

RETIREMENT

It Is Never Too Late to Be What You Might Have Been

By Larry Feldman, Jr.



Reasons You May Want to Retire

Lawyers and judges work diligently to establish practices, build businesses and earn reputations throughout their careers. We have entire associations dedicated to promoting our accomplishments and achievements. These associations even give us awards and offer us discounts on hotels and restaurants. The practice of law is a lifelong pursuit of which we are proud to be affiliated. Therefore, it is no surprise that, among lawyers and judges, there are many highly successful and publicly acknowledged people. It should also be no surprise when it is hard for some to part with the trappings of legal earnings and esteem. So, when thinking about retirement, know first and foremost you don't have to do it unless you really need or want to. Simply put, retirement is not, and should not, be for everyone.

Why would you want to stop working? Here are my top three reasons, but I am sure there are many others.

First, you might want to embrace the quote from Mary Anne Evans, aka George Eliot: "It is never too late to be what you might have been." Maybe you want to try to be that person you might have been. There is still time. Write a book and get it published. Volunteer for pro bono work or become a mentor to young lawyers because you have acquired experience which can really help them understand the profession. Volunteer to do something for which you have no experience — maybe at the library, museum or shelter. You might want to become a scratch golfer. How about taking care of your grandkids?

Second, like eating good cheesecake, you've had enough. It's time to figuratively lay down your fork and think about eating something else. How about a new

diet of traveling, spending more time with family and friends, getting in better shape, or continuing your education? You could fire the gardener and become the gardener yourself.

Third, the Law or Business Machine has chewed you up and spit you out. You can't take it anymore, or even if you can take it, you don't want to. This may leave you with some negative feelings, but that's okay. You are choosing to stop the work you've been doing and do something more positive for yourself and maybe for those around you, too. Change can be uplifting, and there are other adventures ahead.

Of course, there are other reasons to retire or not to retire. Your advancing age — what some have long called "old age" — may be an excuse to retire, even if you are in good health. Reduced income may be an important factor in your decision whether to retire; however, you may wonder if the adage "money isn't everything" fits you. Again, seniority and prestige might feel too good to you to lose, but they are simply by-products of respect. You don't have to

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Ready to Retire and Looking for Things in the Legal Arena to Fill Your Time?

Volunteer for pro bono work. Access several options on the Louisiana State Bar Association's website or by talking to your local pro bono organization.

Legal services and pro bono providers offer opportunities for attorneys to volunteer in a variety of ways, serving clients directly or indirectly. As a volunteer, you can provide direct or indirect legal services to indigent clients through pro bono or other public interest law firms of your choice. As an advocate, you can encourage others to help or organize advocacy efforts. As a mentor or resource provider, you can furnish indirect legal services, such as your experience, to others providing direct services.

Assistance is greatly needed. By getting involved, you can make a positive impact on the lives of indigent individuals. You can support fellow members of the legal profession who provide these services. You can provide a positive image of a legal professional in your community, and you can experience the satisfaction of "making a difference."

Read more online at: www.lsba.org/atj or www.probono.net/la/projects/.

Become a mentor to young lawyers. Impart your knowledge, advice and hands-on experience to those beginning to grow their own practices. There's lots of information on the Transition Into Practice (TIP) Mentoring Program and the Spot Mentoring Program online.

TIP matches one mentor with one mentee, giving newly admitted attorneys access to veteran attorneys to assist with their transition into the practice of law. During the program, mentees learn practical skills and what is expected of them as members of the Louisiana State Bar Association. Mentors share their wisdom and experience they have gained through their careers. In essence, mentors are helping to "grow" the Bar and the legal profession for decades to come.

Read more and sign up online at: www.lsba.org/mentoring.



lose respect if you're no longer a partner or member of this or that firm. They don't take away your Respect Badge if you leave your corner office, lose your primo parking spot, or give up your title as first assistant to the ever-changing position of U.S. Attorney or Attorney General. If you were thought of as the "lion of the bar" when you worked, you'll still be a lion when you don't. Retiring from the day-to-day does not vitiate years and decades of the ethical and zealous practice of law.

Have a Plan

Even if you want to retire or think you may want to, don't do it until you have taken the time to plan. If you have a plan, or think you have one, don't retire unless you've been honest with yourself about why you're doing it. Finally, even if you have a plan and think you've been honest about your reasons, then don't retire until you talk to others and hear their experiences and ideas.

Interview the client. Uh, that would be you! What are your expectations? You have spent your career knowing the importance of preparation, and the decision to retire requires preparation, too. Don't let this be a superficial discussion with yourself. Get close to the mirror and be forceful. Be brutally honest. You think you're going to hurt your own feelings? You're not! Keep asking yourself what you can do and what you want to do. It might seem exhausting but think of it as a kind of cardio workout of the mind.

Interview the character witnesses. There is nothing wrong with working, no matter what your age, if you like it and can still competently and effectively perform the required tasks. Enlist family, friends, partners, associates, confidants, the woman who cuts your hair, the guy who runs the laundry or whoever will be honest with you about your abilities. Sometimes humans create illusions about what their reality looks like. Sometimes the image in the mirror can be distorted. Somewhere in the back of that big brain of yours, you may believe you can dance for the Bolshoi, run a Fortune 500 company or play second base for the Yankees. But we're lawyers and judges, and if there's no evidence, not a scintilla, to support those beliefs, then you need to recognize it. You need to know

whether you can still do the work.

Interview those who have retired. They are the fact witnesses. The ones who already have retired know some stuff. Be mindful of what they have done and how they did it and whether your experience will be similar. Ask retirees what they do, and not just in general. Find out what they do every day, all day. You need to think about how you will fill your mornings and what you'll do at 2:30 in the afternoon. Cross-examine the witnesses about how they feel about their lives in retirement. Try to find out what has worked for them. Are they happy? Are they happy enough? Are they satisfied?

Time Still Passes

You should understand that, when you retire, time will still exist. My parents, and maybe yours, said time seemed to go by even faster after they retired. I couldn't believe it because outwardly they didn't seem to do much, so I assumed time was dragging by. I was wrong. Before you retire, and after you retire, 24 hours will still be 24 hours. Time sheets become unnecessary — a good development — but you can still manage your time. Write down your schedule or put it in your notes app on your phone. As lawyers and judges, we're mostly good planners and many of us are good at making plans and have excellent lists to prove it. Even in retirement, it might be a good thing to understand how you spend your hours, days, weeks, months and, ultimately, years. This knowledge can be instructive and comforting. But know that this schedule can and will change because, well, you can't plan for everything. Be flexible about running errands, taking care of the grandkids, playing golf, going out with friends, or tending to your yard. It is hard to record "did nothing" on this



Larry Feldman, Jr. with granddaughters Eliza, left, and Maren Moriarty. Photo provided by Larry Feldman, Jr.

imaginary time sheet, but don't be afraid to do it and see how it feels.

Personally, I planned and planned, then I retired. Now, I've changed my plans several times already. As I see it, I'm two-plus years into another career which is generically called "retirement." I do consider it a new adventure which already has lots of sub-parts. I hope to add more. My life before retirement was fulfilled, in part, because I successfully practiced law for almost 50 years. Now, my life has changed, but I still feel fulfilled. I hope those feelings continue, and I hope the same for you. I wish you luck with your decision. Call me if you want to discuss. I will have time to talk to you because I'm retired.

Larry Feldman, Jr., before joining the ranks of emeritus members of the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA), was a member in the New Orleans office of McGlinchey Stafford, PLLC, and affiliated with the Patterson Resolution Group, LLC. He is the current chair of the Louisiana Supreme Court's Committee on Bar Admissions. He has served as a probation monitor and as a member of the Judicial Compensation Committee. He is a member of the LSBA's Bar Governance Committee. He is a former LSBA president (2002-03) and a former LSBA secretary and Louisiana Bar Journal editor. He served on the LSBA's Board of Governors and chaired the Continuing Legal Education Committee. (lfeldman1987@gmail.com)

