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IN SIGHT *for Oregon Lawyers*

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

REFLECTIONS ON RETIREMENT

I was a small-town practitioner for more than thirty years. While I was in practice, I laid down certain rules to guide me in both my professional and personal affairs. Some worked; some did not. Some I followed; some I didn't. But in the nearly five years since I left the active practice of law, I've found that certain retirement guidelines I set for myself have been important in overcoming some of the hurdles and surprises that can accompany this season of life for many folks. To help you prepare, here are my 10 rules for retirement and how they affected this country lawyer.

Before You Retire

1. Make sure you can afford it. I was about 50 when I finally realized that (a) I wasn't going to be able to live on Social Security benefits alone; and (b) if I was going to have a pension, I had to create it and fund it myself. So I taught myself the stock market. I read the consumer finance magazines, listened to investment shows, and worked through five different stockbrokers before I found the formula. The essential part is what my dad told me – pay yourself first.

2. Ditch the debt. Get your home mortgage paid off. Use credit cards if you wish (I like the frequent flyer miles), but make sure you pay the balance in full each month.

3. Plan how to hand off your practice. If you're a member of a multilawyer firm, you should have a partnership agreement or stock purchase agreement that will cash out your equity and ensure competent continuing service to your clients. If you're a sole practitioner, plan ahead to find a competent lawyer to take over and buy you out. My successor practiced with me as an associate for about two years before I retired. I have

never had a former client complain about my successor's services.

4. Get a good medical plan. If you're going to retire before Medicare becomes available, make sure you have a good health insurance plan that will cover you and your family at a price you can afford.

5. Make sure your family agrees with your plan. If you have a target date for retirement, make certain that your spouse and others close to you understand and agree with what you propose. Retirement is a tough job. It takes understanding and cooperation from all involved in your personal life.

After You Retire

6. Guard your health. Find a doctor you can communicate with, and preferably one who is not ready to retire right after you do. See your doctor regularly and get appropriate periodic lab tests. Read up on the diseases of age. Make a list of questions to ask at each appointment – and make sure you get answers. Exercise and stay in shape. Watch your diet and weight. Staying well is a post-retirement job.

7. Have things to do. Too many lawyers retire and discover that they don't know how to do anything except practice law. Develop interests and stay busy. Keep in touch with relatives and friends. Take advantage of fraternal or club affiliations. Travel.

8. Plan for your death. You need to have a competent estate plan. Make a list of your assets so they can be found after you are gone. Make a plan with your chosen funeral home. Make sure your

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heirs understand how you intend for your assets to be distributed at your death. That way, they'll likely stick with your plan and not get their feelings hurt. I even suggest you write your own obituary in advance. (Have you seen those silly things some people write about those who have passed on?)

9. Stay organized. Thinking can get a little fuzzy after retirement. Keep a pocket calendar for the important stuff and a separate to-do list for each day. You'll get more done that way.

10. Most important, be prepared for the unexpected. My marriage of over 30 years collapsed right after I retired. My wife rightfully got one-half of our assets in the settlement. Fortunately, I had planned for the unexpected and have enough left to continue in comfort.

Scott McArthur

The author was in private practice in Monmouth, Oregon. He served as a member of the Oregon State Bar Board of Governors and was a frequent lecturer and writer on practice management.