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If Not Now, When?

June was a difficult month. A friend less than a year older than I am quickly succumbed to a resurgence of breast cancer. A colleague three years younger suddenly died of complications related to diabetes, although he had looked fine just a few months ago when I last saw him. Such events make me pause to acknowledge how uncertain life is, and how important it is to reassess periodically. If we are not careful, our work may take over our daily routines. Will we ever make the time to fulfill the plans and dreams we made for ourselves in simpler and less “production oriented” times?

The chain of command changed overnight when the owner and president of the company I worked for in 1996 was felled by a massive coronary. A new general manager’s position was filled by a man with whom I had previously had minimal contact, but he seemed nice enough. “Nice enough” and “good working relationship” did not equate, and we were soon butting heads as I tried to maintain stability and consistency in my division during company overhauls. To me, my staff came first. An unhappy staff means poor work results, and without good staff, the division would not exist.

The effort over the next year was stressful. First came sleep disruption, followed by stomach malaise. Loyalty to my staff kept me fighting for them, to maintain their benefits and working conditions. But when the chest pains

started, the final line in the sand had been crossed. Leaving after seven years was going to be like leaving home; could I maybe last a little longer until things turned around? Not knowing when that indefinite brightness would arrive, I realized my health was on the line. If I did not leave now, then when?

hit hard: if not now, when would it be “convenient” to comfort my father and pay my respects to Denise? There was only one time to do it, and that time was now. While the next work trip could not be changed and by usual standards the entire process was maximally inconvenient, there was no better time to be at

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I gave a month’s notice. As it turned out, leaving gave me the opportunity to reassess what I really wanted to do, and so this year I celebrate ten years of working for myself.

The spring of 2000 brought a painful reminder of the priority choices and decisions we face regularly. The day I returned from two weeks overseas on business, my father called from across the country with broken voice and heart to tell me that his wife had just passed away. Could I come to the memorial service in three days?

California is more than a quick drive from Philadelphia, and another looming business trip made the prospect of rushing across the continent and back again very uninviting. But reality

my father’s side than when he needed me the most. Within two years, he was gone as well, taking with him any second chances the future might have brought.

A childhood friend and his sweetheart of 20 years recently sold their house and retired early to travel slowly across the country on their move from Pennsylvania to Alaska (a place they love). While the original plan was to start this grand journey in 2009, his father’s sudden death last winter made him realize that time does not last forever. As he put it, “Why are we waiting?” Their blog is a testament to how much there is still to learn and admire in the world, how much is still new and exciting no matter our age.

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THE American Surveyor

A FOOT IN THE PAST... AN EYE TO THE FUTURE



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I know many folks who put off living their lives and taking charge of their own happiness because “the time is not right”. They will look for a more satisfying job when the economy improves. They will take that dream cruise some time, maybe after they retire or after their children are on their own financial feet. But if not now, when? The perfect time doesn’t ever seem to materialize, as one detail or another creates a problem that, while not insurmountable, makes inertia the easier path. My own aspirations include a lifelong desire to learn how to tap dance. There just never seems to be enough time to take lessons.

Eighteen months ago, my husband and I lost our dog to a cancer now increasingly common in Golden Retrievers. Watching our formerly robust and playful young companion grow thin and weak, although still slowly wagging his tail until the last week of his life, our hearts ached that there was nothing we could do to save him. After it was all over, we both cried a long time. Months later, realizing how much we missed canine company (although we also have two wonderful and affectionate feline family members), I brought up the possibility of starting to look for another dog.

How shocked and saddened I was to hear Skip say, “Maybe I’m too busy for a dog anymore.” That statement made it blazingly obvious that our workaholic lives were too full of everything but real life. If too busy to walk or play with a dog, then something was drastically out of balance. Yes, the first few months of raising a puppy are like raising any baby, with middle of the night care shared by grumbling sleep-deprived parents. Yes, teaching right and wrong does take time, effort and patience. But if not now, when would our lives be quiet enough to have another dog? In the end, we did adopt a puppy, presently a one-year-old handful as he romps through the dog equivalent of a teenager pushing the envelope. But “now” was the perfect time to bring him into our hearts and home, restoring laughter and a little more balance.

While formal tap dancing lessons are still somewhere on my life “to do” list, I have learned to clog and step dance, international variations on that theme. It’s fun, it’s a move toward traditional tapping, and it’s now. And I’ve realized that it’s not about having shoes with little metal clickers but just moving with free exuberance that really matters after all. *A*

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confidentiality language we felt would adversely impact our future operations in an area. Explaining to the client how the quality of their project will be enhanced by our consideration of previous work in an area usually convinces them of the perpetual utility of records.

Beyond all that, how can our work be presumed confidential when we often monument our results? The very nature of monumentation is to put others *on notice*; notice is repugnant to confidentiality. The recording of our plats is another form of notice. On one hand we piously claim to safeguard our client’s secrets, while on the other we document their holdings in the most accessible and permanent of repositories—the land records. Frankly, given the public nature of our results, it seems hard to assert privacy with a straight face.

But, some surveyors do. I have had surveyors balk at releasing information on former surveys because their clients had not authorized the release, even in instances when the surveys were decades old. In some cases, both the client and the original surveyor were dead. We know these are merely ploys to avoid releasing the data. A former boss of mine (now dead) routinely took that position. Looking back, I realize that no agreement ever existed between him and his clients curtailing access to the data. He just didn’t want to give the records out, period. What goes around, comes around. Since our firm now has his records, they are available to all. Come and get ‘em.

The Big Picture

Although it is not our place to decide what should be and what should not be important to our clients, we have a duty to the public in preserving (and making available) information on property boundaries. In our society’s form of land ownership, that of an interconnected fabric of holdings, the very interconnectedness implies that others have an interest in knowing property limits. Sadly, because of the threats confronting on-the-ground evidence of those holdings, the preservation of those locations is a central task for us. We surveyors are stewards of that knowledge, holding it in trust for society at large. Few clients begin conversations with us with that in mind, but we must never forget it.

Confidentiality flies in the face of that. Just between you and me. *A*