

UPDATE

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This issue is being published early this summer on behalf of the many employees retiring from UW Oshkosh this month.



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Retirement: Necessary Losses and New Opportunities

By: Thomas K. Hocking, Ph.D.

*"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
soon bears us all away;
We fly forgotten, as a dream
fades at the opening day."*

The words of a very old and familiar hymn caught my attention, conveying a meaning to me that has been increasingly salient lately. Interestingly, the words were not discordant or negative in any way, but rather somewhat soothing and reassuring. The relevance of this verse for me has to do with the fact that I have been planning my retirement, on June 30, 1999. I do that with mixed feelings, knowing on the one hand that it is time, while on the other hand realizing that retiring is another of life's major transitions which will generate for me a process of disorientation and reorientation just as all the previous ones have.

Aging seems to take most of us by surprise. In many ways, we do not feel much different than we did at 18, or 25, or 30, because there is some internal consistency in who we perceive ourselves to be. Our physical self is where the alarm is usually sounded. I had to quit running around age 50 and find some other form of exercise that was kinder to the knees. Used to getting a clean bill of health from dentists and doctors, I found it disconcerting when they began to find things that needed fixing. You know you are aging when every health care provider in town knows you by your first name! I began to be aware that I no longer had the stamina and energy that I once had for either work or play. As one author put it, if you put cotton in your ears, pebbles in your shoes, put on rubber gloves, and smear Vaseline over your glasses, you have some idea what aging is like. I also have been aware of another of life's paradoxes: When I was in my early thirties and fresh out of graduate school, some of my colleagues minimized and disqualified my ideas because I was "too young" and inexperienced; in recent years, some minimize and disqualify my ideas because I am "too old" and out of touch. Was there a period in between when I was "right on"? I can't remember. At any rate, in the fifties and early sixties, I have been aware of a growing accumulation of past, and an ever-narrowing of future.

Questions COMMENTS Ideas

For Questions on the
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OR EAP UPDATE -

Susan E. Barbour, Ed.D.,
EAP Director

Reasons why I haven't submitted an article/commentary to the EAP Update.....and a reply to the reason:

I can't spell

Editing will be done for you. Besides, the EAP Update has its fair share of misspellings, try as they may.

I am not creative

The EAP Update wants to make it possible for the community to know each other. You don't have to be "creative" to do it. Just talk about what you know.

I don't have the time

Time is short for those who decide to do other things that are more important. Once you decide you would like to do this, time won't be a problem.

What good would it do? No one reads those things anyway.

Yes, actually people do read them. EAP get calls from people with questions, suggestion and complaints.

I'd be too embarrassed to have all those people read them.

Enjoy the fame, you deserve it. Let's make this a better place.

I don't know what to write about.

Let's say that another way "it won't be good". You can write about anything and I think it would be interesting, depending on how interesting it is to you. What is meaningful to you conveys to others. **Give it a try.**

If you would like to submit more "REASONS" why you don't submit an article to the EAP Update, please send to:

**The Employee Assistance Program
201 Dempsey Hall**

We invite submissions to the newsletter as well.



UPCOMING IN THE FALL

Brown Bag Seminars

Caring for Your Aging Parents

Joscelyn Deanovich,
Community Outreach Coordinator,
Woven Hearts.

September 22, 1998

The Problem with Happiness

Marshall Missner, Ph.D.,
UW Oshkosh Faculty Philosopher

ADHD or Just Strong Willed:

What Makes my Kid Act Like This?

Dee Christenson, MSSW, CICSW,
Private Practice, Appleton, WI.

EAP Update Staff:

For further information contact
Employee Assistance Program
at 920-424-1078

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IRC - Layout

Document Services - Duplication

Did you Know? Facts about EAP.

- The EAP recently raised the limit from 3 consultations to 5 consultations per year for employees and/or their family members. Consultation is without cost.
- All Brown Bag Seminars are taped. (I think one did not record well); Employees may borrow those tapes by calling the EAP Office at 424-1078.
- There are no longer Volunteer Resource Persons ; The EAP Advisory Board voted to **disband the VRP program** in the fall of 1998 ; EAP staff are experienced professional counselors and psychologists certified or licensed by the state of Wisconsin.
- You are invited to give your **feedback** to the program director at any time. Do so by calling Susan Barbour at 424-1078.
- EAP now has a **website**: www.uwosh.edu/eap. Check it out.



**The stages of my life
are coming full circle—the
streetlights have come on,
and it's time to go
home...**

I have been influenced greatly in my thinking about retirement as the next transition in my life by a book by Judith Viorst titled **Necessary Losses** (1986). She deals with the vital bond between our losses and gains over the life cycle, with what we give up and "lose" in order to grow. These losses are connected to leaving and being left, to changing, and to letting go and moving on: separations and departures from those we care about; our conscious and unconscious losses of dreams and impossible expectations; the loss of illusions of freedom, power and safety; the loss of our own younger self that thought it would always be unwrinkled, invulnerable, and immortal. Viorst says, "...the road to human development is paved with renunciation. Throughout our life we grow by giving up. We give up some of our deepest attachments to others. We give up certain cherished parts of ourselves... Passionate investment leaves us vulnerable to loss. And sometimes, no matter how clever we are, we must lose." Central to understanding and managing our lives is understanding how we deal with inevitable losses. Viorst asserts that the people we are and the lives we lead are determined, for better or worse, by our loss experiences. Transitions in our lives follow a predictable pattern, from loss to rebirth, involving a natural process of disorientation and reorientation of one's self and one's world that demands changes in assumptions and behavior.

The largest loss which retirement poses for me is the loss of a profession

that has defined who I am for well over thirty years.

I consider myself blessed to have been able to earn a living doing something I love. At the outset, I wanted a career which would allow me to "make a difference" in the world and in the lives of others. I decided fairly early that I was not destined to change the world in any global terms, as desperately as it needs changing. Rather, I opted to attempt to help one person at a time with whatever difficulty he or she was experiencing, hoping that this person would find a way through it and go on to help many others in his or her lifetime. That was a view of immortality I learned from my teacher parents. I enjoyed the relationships that were possible with students in the classroom, but the one-to-one relationship with students in counseling was more enjoyable and rewarding for me. I doubt that very many of my student clients ever knew how much I got from **them**. And related to the loss of my professional identity in every-day terms, will be the loss of routine contact with my colleagues who sustained me for over three decades in a high burn-out rate occupation. My job and my colleagues were what kept me organized and feeling supported when I experienced losses at earlier transition points in my life and had to muddle through them somehow. When I leave the University in June, I expect that I will once again experience a period of disorientation connected to loss. I will be "sixty-something" and starting over in some respects.

The popular and psychological literature has in recent times been paying a lot of attention to the idea of "resilience," the strength to contain within reasonable limits the extent of our personal disruption, and to reassemble the pieces of ourselves and our lives after a loss or transition. I am counting on the notion that I have some of that, learned in large measure from my resilient parents and resilient friends. Frederick

Flach, who wrote a book on the subject, says that resilience is related, in some combination or another, to qualities like self-esteem; independence; friends and a social network; personal discipline and initiative; a recognition of special gifts and talents; receptiveness to new ideas; dreams; interests; a sense of humor; the mental habit of asking searching questions; tolerance of distress; and a commitment to life and a philosophical framework. I have never in my adult life considered that I had any other option than to work full-time. I now have that option for the first time, and I am looking forward to it. I intend to "work," but on my terms and on my schedule rather than someone else's.

My heritage as the son of teachers, and as an undergraduate English Major, is a love of reading and writing, and I have some skills doing both. Hence, I intend to get involved in genealogy, researching and writing my family history as an interest of mine and a legacy for my children and grandchildren. I hope to find out exactly where my family came from in the United Kingdom and Germany, and to go there for first-hand information and experience, at least partly because travel is another interest of mine and my wife's. I also have a personal library which I will never read my way entirely through. As an "only child" in my family, I learned to like my own company fairly early and to have time to work and think alone. That is fortunate, since my wife will very likely continue to work full- or part-time for several years. Yet I am fortunate to have friends and children and grandchildren nearby. There are several "dreams" which I have not been able to fulfill during my career that I may pursue now that there is time. Perhaps it is a little too late to take flying lessons, but I am a so-far thwarted musician who would like to resume piano lessons which were not very important in grades seven and eight. I also feel a deep sense of embarrassment when I travel abroad, where many people speak my language and I am largely ignorant of theirs. I may want to improve my German, and to learn something more of French and Spanish. And who knows what else might serendipitously appear that I might want to get involved in? I will keep my

psychologist's license for at least two more years, but I have a sense of "been there, done that" at the present time.

Someone has said that it is harder for the soul to sing as it gets older, and it is even harder for the body. So, I realize that if my soul is going to sing at all, I need to do what I can for the body. I signed up for the University Employee Health Promotion Program (UEHPP) offered by the Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation for all University Employees, intending to get on a regular workout program that I can continue after retiring. I have an excellent student personal trainer who set up a program for me of stretching, light weight lifting, machines, aqua-jogging, and

swimming which is tailored for my interests and needs. The trainer supervises my program and evaluates my progress at semester's end. I highly recommend the program to anyone, regardless of age or present physical condition. In my mind it is a real bargain associated with working here. I have prepared for retirement by attending the classes offered by the Human Resources Office for anyone contemplating that decision, and I can recommend them for the wealth of information that is efficiently conveyed. I also took a twelve-hour retirement class at Fox Valley Technical College offered by a Financial Planning Firm last summer that was excellent, and motivated me to put into place a comprehensive plan for managing my financial future.

My wife and I have talked about and planned for this next big step of mine, and I have had no qualms or second thoughts about the decision since we made it last summer. I am looking forward to this next stage in my life cycle because, though it will be a loss, it is a necessary loss and I will need to reorient myself and accommodate to it like all the others. Frederick Flach says, "If we have learned to adapt to changing circumstances, we will adapt to these. If we know how gracefully, though not without grief, to let go of what we can no longer hold on to—health, loved ones, friendships, careers—we will be less prone to thrash against the inevitability of loss." The stages of my life are coming full circle—the streetlights have come on, and it's time to go home...

It's never too late – the best is yet to come!

It is so easy to assume that mid-life is the only time for productivity. Consider the following:

- **Actor George Burns won his first Oscar at age 80**
- **Golda Meir was 71 when she became prime minister of Israel.**
- **At age 96, playwright George Bernard Shaw broke his leg when he fell out of a tree he was trimming in his backyard.**
- **Painter Grandma Moses didn't start painting until she was 80 years old. She completed over 1,500 paintings after that; 25 percent of those were produced when she was past 100.**
- **Michaelangelo was 71 when he painted the Sistine Chapel.**
- **Physician and humanitarian Albert Schweitzer was still performing operations in his African hospital at 89.**
- **Doc Counsilman, at 58, became the oldest person ever to swim the English Channel.**
- **S.I. Hayakawa retired as president of San Francisco State University at 70, then was elected to the U.S. Senate.**
- **Casey Stengel didn't retire from managing the New York Mets until he was 75.**

