Worksheet

Celebrating My Work Life

"[W]e become the story we tell ourselves.
Not because of fate, or self-determination,
but because we filter the future and
edit the past to fit our preferred narrative."

- Scott H. Young

Looking for a volunteer position or encore career that will make you eager to pop out of bed in the morning? It might help to look back at your vocations or avocations from years past. What did you enjoy? What did you loathe?

In my own case, I looked back to re-discover how much I enjoyed researching something meaningful to me, and then sharing that with others. Hence the Beyond Enough mentor hat. Conversely, looking back helped me recall how much I hated responding to regulatory forms and doing repetitive tasks. I definitely won't be volunteering to keep the books for any of the charities we support.

Here's another example of the potential benefit of looking back: During a hike as a volunteer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I met a man who was a few months away from retirement. He expressed great disappointment and frustration in his present work for the U.S. Post Office, and contrasted it with how much he used to love his job; he was counting the days and hours until he could leave. Doing an exercise like this one might help him keep his focus on what he liked about his former work, and the contributions he made.

I think the increasing disenchantment with work as our retirement date nears often lets us say goodbye and walk out the door for the last time. It's somewhat like the angst that develops between teenagers and their parents…"Adolescence is perhaps nature's way of preparing parents to welcome the empty nest," Say Karen Savage and Patricia Adams in The Good Stepmother.

I put together the following questions to add some structure to this journey through the past. Take time with it; I've found that people who move past simple one-word answers seem to get more value out of it. Consider asking some former co-workers to give you input; you may well have forgotten things you've done that were very meaningful to others. Reflect on all your careers, including child-rearing or care-giving, as well as community work.

Looking Back

- What were you good at professionally? Include things at the start, middle and beginning of your work years. This may well include more than one job or profession, as well as non-paid work at home or in your community.

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- What are some positive differences you've made, during the course of your work life, for:
  - clients/customers/patients _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

  - profession/coworkers _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

  - family/neighbors/friends _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

  - yourself _____
    _____
    _____

- How did you change and grow personally and professionally during your working years? _____
_____
_____
_____

The Big Day

- How will you mark this transition from full-time work? A party? A special bucket list trip? _____
_____
_____

Looking Forward

- Will you look for another opportunity to earn money, or is this a change to a more traditional retirement, where you intend to be busy and involved but don't foresee yourself working for money? _____
_____
_____
_____

- Might you consider consulting or mentoring in your field?
_____
_____
_____