

Since I announced my plans to retire at the end of June, I have been overwhelmed by the kind and generous comments and good wishes from so many wonderful people. Thank you!

I have also been asked countless times “so, what are you going to do?” This is a question I asked myself many, MANY times before making and announcing my decision and I am on a path to figuring it out. So in this posting, I’m sharing what I know and inviting you to offer any ideas you have. Having learned the importance of design principles for Steelcase projects through the years, I am applying the same strategic approach to the next stage of my life. These are my redesign principles:

Embrace the Freedom
Stay Healthy & become Healthier
Add Value to Make a Difference
Get Connected & Stay Connected
Gain New Perspectives

If you are interested in knowing more, please read on...

Embrace the Freedom: After all these years, it is almost impossible to imagine a calendar that isn’t jammed from morning to night with calls, meetings, appointments, projects, etc. etc. This “open calendar” phenomenon turns out to be one of the scariest things when people step away from their careers. The recommended advice is to politely say “no – not now” to ideas and offers that come your way for 6 months (minimally) so you can decide how “busy” you want to be and, more importantly, how you want to spend your time.

I have received this guidance no less than six times from people I respect who received the same coaching themselves. Those who followed it had few, if any, regrets and have built a new life based on what matters most to them. Those who didn’t were good enough to share the frustration they felt when a year after retiring when they found themselves staring at a calendar filled with commitments and activities they did not feel passionate about and yet were now obligated to. I am committing to the six month “no, thank you, not yet...” practice, and have already been using it.

Stay healthy & become healthier: I have been blessed with good genes and try never to take my health for granted. This means more regular exercise as well as some new activities (yes, I am going to keep my promise to learn to play golf), eating better and most importantly, sleeping more. As a working mom, I short-changed myself on sleep for years by using the early morning hours before my family awoke to get all kinds of “stuff” and work done. Luckily I am a morning person, so I actually like this time of day. But research tells us that we can’t get back the restorative power of sleep that we lose each time we decide that 4-5 hours is “enough.”

Part of being healthier will include finding outlets for some pent up creativity. I have always enjoyed working with my hands (knitting, sewing, painting, sketching, etc.) and would hesitate to say that I am really good at any of these activities. But there is a different sense of accomplishment that comes from engaging this part of my brain and personality. Who knows, with more time and focus, maybe I will improve or maybe that won’t even matter as long as I feel satisfied. What a concept!

Add Value to make a Difference: I grew up in New Jersey in a middle class family, raised by two loving parents who themselves had grown up during the Depression. What my parents wanted most for their three children were the things they didn’t always have growing up – a sense of security (a roof over our heads and food on the table) and confidence that we were loved. They gave us these things and whatever more they could afford, which wasn’t much. Ultimately we learned that “things” were totally inconsequential in comparison to what we gained from their love and support.

There are so many children here in West Michigan who don’t have the basic security and/or love

they need to thrive. How does a child develop self-esteem if they are not validated by having food to eat? How does anyone break out of the cycle of poverty without help? Local organizations like West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology (WMCAT) and Grand Rapids University Prep Academy (UPrep) have shown me the power of changing lives, one at a time. Issues of poverty, hunger and the lack of adequate education are ones that I want to dedicate more time and energy to in the coming years.

(Okay....this is probably much longer than you expected, so it is perfectly fine to take a break or just say “enough!” and come back later if you wish...)

Get Connected & Stay Connected: One of my redesign priorities is to be present and connected to people in my life now and in the past who have been so instrumental to helping me become who I am today. For you recent college graduates, it is probably unfathomable that you might sometime in the future let 10, 20 or even more years pass without seeing your roommates, housemates and dearest friends from college. Listen up now, this is likely to happen to you. You, and they, will find your lives changing and complicating in ways you can't even imagine now. Do all you can to keep those relationships alive even if it means only exchanging annual holiday cards.

Last May I spent the weekend with my college roommate, Ann, after not seeing each other for over 20 years. In no time at all, that 20 year span felt like only 20 minutes. In the coming years I want to reconnect often with Ann and other friends and family members who have never stopped being important to me, but for whom I had no “quality” time left to share during my career or while raising my children. I hope they will understand and forgive my absence.

And I want to stay connect to the people who are part of my very happy life today and that means many of you. You make my days better and I want to be a part of your futures just by staying connected in some ways that feel comfortable and easy for you.

Gain New Perspectives: Despite extensive travel for business, there is so much more see and experience, and I want to share this with my husband, Gerry, our daughters and friends whenever possible. We are assembling our “bucket list” of places to see and experience beginning later this year. *We would love to hear about places you have been - near and far - that hold some special meaning or experience for you.* We are interested in active travel when possible, meaning biking or hiking or lots of walking. We also want to be active learners, so suggestions about classes or courses, books or other ways to learn about cultures would be much appreciated.

So patient reader, there is the long and current answer to the frequent question “what are you going to do next?” I hope you'll offer me the coaching and feedback that I have come to count on from you. In exchange I will find ways to share what I am learning, reading, doing and to share tips for your own “redesign” project if you wish.

Many thanks.

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