

# Your spouse has a next season, too

Retirement isn't just for executives; it affects both members of the couple

Anxiety that so often accompanies an executive's transition, such as retirement, manifests itself in questions deep inside: Who am I now? What will I do next?



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Most of us define ourselves by our careers and job titles. The thought of these going away, especially in cases where there is little lead time to prepare, can be paralyzing. Who am I, if I am not the (title) at my company?

What is often forgotten is that spouses and partners — especially those who have foregone careers to be the at-home parent-in-charge — experience the exact same stressors. Who am I, if I am not Susan and Johnny's mom, the parent advisory chair, the football booster club marketer, the nurse to the sick and the mender of broken hearts? How will I spend my days after the kids are gone?

### Quiet, selfless service

Spouses and partners — who have dedicated their lives at home while the executive pursues his or her career, who have actively parented the children, who have been the trusted adviser to the executive through corporate life cycles and leadership challenges — also go through a huge career transition when the last child leaves the nest and/or when the working spouse retires.

In fact, it is no less difficult for the spouse to navigate this transition than it is for the executive. The only difference is that there are no retirement parties, no formal honors or recognition of contributions, no gifts or plaques for the differences made for decades of selfless service.

### Unlock doors not yet opened

Deciding what to do next isn't easy for anyone who has enjoyed success in his or her main-stage career, whether in the workplace or home space.

Recognizing that this is a huge transition for both members of a couple is an important first step. Empathy and encouragement need to flow generously in both directions.

The silver lining of this season, beyond just hairlines, is that the closing of oft-used doors unlocks possibilities behind doors not yet opened. This is a time for each of you to pursue passions you have kept at bay while you have lived for your work.

There are opportunities for both of you to make a difference in things or people you care about, through your presence and engagement in places you likely had no bandwidth for before.

Whether it's through volunteering for a nonprofit, mentoring others, being (more) present for neighbors, friends and family members, or finally pursuing dreams and desires, this is a season of unlimited possibilities in a world with great needs.

Each of you has gained great wisdom in your preceding decades. Deciding how to channel that intentionally to achieve greater purpose and discover new passions is important work to be done in your next season.

It is an important time for you both. For the first time in a long while, perhaps, you can prioritize the needs/wants of your spouse/partner equal to or ahead of your own.

It is a time of great celebration for you both. Enjoy it. Together. ●