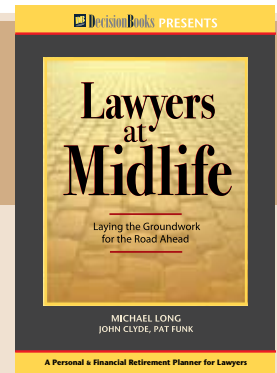


Lawyers at Midlife: Laying the Groundwork for the Road Ahead

By Michael Long, John Clyde, and Pat Funk,
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LawyerAvenue.com



Reviewed by Jeffrey Caminsky

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under Heaven.”

— Ecclesiastes 3:1

Like many people, lawyers are often too busy with their own careers to think about how their lives will change as they grow older. After all, it makes no difference to our clients what kind of pension plan we have, and after devoting so much time and effort into honing our skills as advocates, we can have trouble imagining ourselves doing anything else.

Working as the attorney-counselor for the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program, author Michael Long saw firsthand many of the problems facing attorneys nearing the end of their careers. Seeking to organize a series of retirement workshops for lawyers and judges he worked with, he found resources available for many other groups but precious little to help lawyers nearing what the American Bar Association calls their “second season of service.” He joined two financial planners who specialized in helping people make the transition from work to retirement and decided to create such a resource. The result is *Lawyers at Midlife*, a book intended to help lawyers look beyond their daily professional lives and see the professional and personal landscape that lies just over the horizon.

Lawyers at Midlife aims specifically at attorneys contemplating the unique personal challenges involved with one of life’s biggest transitions: retirement. Well written and easy to understand, it is less a guidebook to retirement planning than a roadmap for attorneys looking ahead to life after law.

Various motifs highlight the diverse aspects of a maturing career: financial and estate planning; the continuing need for adequate insurance; and the various aspects of navigating through the swamp of pensions, annuities, and other benefits all have featured sections in the book. Though dry at times, these sections are worth reading for anyone thinking about retiring. The book is also filled with charts and worksheets dealing with topics ranging from planning a retirement budget to taking stock of the reader’s personality and preferences to help explain the challenges ahead and make it easier for the attorney to plan for the future.

The most intriguing portions of the book are those encouraging veteran lawyers to imagine the new possibilities that can lie ahead. Instead of viewing the approach of retirement as an end of our professional lives, the authors challenge readers to see it as the beginning of another chapter, encouraging us to take stock of our passions and dreams to help plan a future in which we can use our skills and intellects in new and interesting ways. If we view retirement as an endless vacation, the authors warn, it will instead become a trap, dulling our

minds and sapping our energy rather than freeing us to indulge in long-postponed dreams and passions. Even our concept of leisure is likely to change as we enter this new phase of life—for, as the authors note, the capacity of “leisure” to refresh us comes only when it is not the central focus of our lives—and one of the interesting distinctions the authors draw is one dealing with working after retirement, comparing the “retirement job” to an “encore career.”

At the end of a long career, many people choose to continue working in one capacity or another. A recent study estimated that 71 percent of current workers planned to continue working after they retired—less out of necessity than a simple wish to keep themselves busy. But there is a difference between a retirement job and what the authors call an encore career.

Simply put, a retirement job is a bridge, helping to make ends meet in the transition between the end of one’s working life and the start of a real retirement. An encore career is, in essence, a goal—often a long-delayed wish to accomplish something different in life. It could be the pursuit of a hobby such as photography or travel. It could

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involve dedicating one's life to a dream, whether that dream is learning to fly or helping to clean up the environment. In short, this encore career is limited only by our imagination and our willingness to look beyond the life we know. As our need for companionship and camaraderie will not end merely because we are choosing to retire from the full-time practice of law, engaging ourselves in new pursuits can help keep our minds fresh and energetic.

For many, the novelty of practicing law can wear off after a lifetime of the profession. But the authors suggest that even a complex case in our own field cannot stimulate our brains as much as mastering a new skill. As we approach retirement age, stretching ourselves beyond the limits of

it can bring our own mortality into sharp relief, as the approaching end of our career reminds us of the eventual end of our own lives—something many of us seek to postpone indefinitely by the simple expedient of planning to work forever.

Like death, the end of our careers is inevitable. One of the most helpful lessons *Lawyers at Midlife* can teach us is to see alternative futures for ourselves that help renew our sense of adventure. Lawyers are not, after all, drawn to the law because they hate the prospect of change. Most of us became lawyers because we enjoy challenging our minds and were drawn to a career that could make a difference in people's lives.

Retirement is not incompatible with the law. If we take the time to review our lives and our dreams as we enter middle age, we can plan for the future with a sense of anticipation rather than dread. By imagining the possibilities of life even in the absence of court hearings, depositions, and billable hours, we can find the twilight of our professional lives to be as exciting and rewarding as we found the dawn.

Lawyers at Midlife is probably not for everyone. Young attorneys at the start of their careers may not find the value in sections on pension, benefits, and winding down a practice. An index would have made it more useful as a reference book, and at \$35, the price for a 228-page paperback may strike some as a bit steep. But for the lawyer contemplating a change in life, it contains valuable help and perspective that may prevent some avoidable problems...and open the door to a world of possibilities. ■

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our profession can pay dividends in terms of personal enrichment and helping to keep us mentally alert. By seeking new sources of intellectual challenge and stimulation for ourselves we can continue using our minds and our training in novel ways to help renew our sense of adventure. But we can do so only by looking at ourselves honestly and deciding how we really want to spend our remaining days.

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He enjoys a variety of interests, including music, sports, camping, and photography. (He used to enjoy politics and current events until they started to depress him; now, he finds both to be a lot like following the Lions.) Occasionally, he pretends to be a writer.