

No place for shoulds

Keep the 's' word out of your next season thinking

Retirement transitions are hard enough without the “helpful” advice generously doled out by former colleagues, neighbors and friends. Such advice usually includes the “s” word: should.



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Those intending to be helpful seem to have an abundance of shoulds for you: “You should go on a corporate board.” “You should spend time with your children and grandchildren.” “You should find a hobby.” “You should focus on your health.” “You should downsize.” “With your experience, you really should ...”

It seems like everyone has a should to offer, and all that serves to do is add another “s” word to your life: stress.

No ground to make up

The shoulds are particularly common for women transitioning out of corporate roles. “You should take some time off.” “You should travel with your husband.” “You should join ...”

It’s as though these advisers have an inside track on what is uniquely right and best for your next phase of life. Women are seen as having sacrificed more in pursuit of their careers, so the shoulds seem to flow more generously, compared to male counterparts. Female clients report it feels as though they have to recover ground they lost by working or somehow make up for what they missed.

I disagree. There is no place for shoulds when it comes to defining how to spend your time. The should ball will be thrown at you but don’t catch it. Let it fall to the floor. You don’t own what you don’t catch.

Each person’s life looks and feels different, based on personal needs and desires, life goals, constraints (personal,

financial, health, geographic), gifts and interests, career experiences, connections/networks, etc. You don’t need to accept someone else’s view or advice. You are the best expert on you.

Take your time

Pause and reflect on what you feel called to do. You’ve worked hard and earned the right to think it through and choose what you want to do, what feels right to you, what brings you joy, where you want to make a difference in your post-corporate life.

And as important as anything is the recognition that you’re deciding only on what’s next, not what’s forever.

Each phase of your life is defined, governed and enabled by so many factors that change: your physical and mental health, the health of your spouse/partner and children, the presence/care of aging parents, etc. Our eyes don’t allow us to see around a corner, which is why you can think about your future in seasons — and seasons change.

Don’t allow yourself to be artificially constrained by someone else’s shoulds, regarding what your retirement looks like. Rather, keep your aperture open wide, for as long as you can, contemplating and examining the unlimited possibilities.

And please: Become deaf to the word should. The only thing defining success in your next season is that you feel joy, purpose, peace and excitement about how you choose to spend your time. It is your life and only your life. There are no shoulds in that. ●