

It's Time



Have you ever had a moment where you realize, “it’s time?” Time to make a change and let go of the past?

When I was 10 years old, I had my first job delivering newspapers.

I woke up before 5 a.m., traversed through our dark neighborhood in hot, cold, rain and even snow, bringing that morning’s The Washington Post to customers doorsteps.

It was my first taste of “working.” It certainly wasn’t easy, but I loved it. In fact, I still have a plaque from the Post in my home office that commends my “outstanding performance during the blizzards of 1987.”

Yes, we even had to deliver those papers during a blizzard!

Working was my comfort zone; it’s where I thrived. From paperboy to various jobs at a dry cleaner, local Chinese restaurant or Blockbuster video, I loved it all—the atmosphere, working with others, even collaborating with some of the owners. I genuinely enjoyed it.

Once I got to college, a then young, growing financial company called Capital One hired me in June 1998, and my professional career officially began.

And what a ride it was.

It included meeting my future wife, working at two prominent Fortune 200 companies, a move to Texas, graduate school and even starting a family. I started as a tax accountant and ended as a director of product management.

After being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, I wanted to continue to work, even as I was receiving monthly infusion for my MS. My former manager told me that “Mike Wentink at 75 percent is better than most,” and I wanted to prove him right.

I had visions of pioneering the 21st century remote executive, living with a chronic disease, but still performing at a high level.

Unfortunately, after 20 years of working, I couldn't sustain the energy required for an entire day, and relapses were becoming common.

So, just over six years ago, I medically retired from the professional workforce.

Although I don't look back with sadness, there is a certain emptiness. Work was a large part of who I was. My identity. My wife and I met at my first job, so working always holds a special place in my heart. And I'll always cherish how she'd look at me, her eyes beaming with pride after some of my career achievements. My car, purchased new in 2009 to celebrate my new position as product manager, sits mostly idle at home, nine years later, with barely 23k miles on it.

And my closet is filled with a work wardrobe that's gathering dust. I guess I should say, **was** filled with work clothes.

Earlier this year, I realized **it was time**.

I've made peace with having MS. I'm no longer chasing the ghosts of who I was; rather, I want to embrace who I've become and can still be.

The clothes had to go.

Taking that step wasn't easy, but you know what? It felt good. Each new day is another opportunity to re-define who you are and to become a new or better person. I'm still “working,” just not how I used to be.

Managing a chronic disease like MS is a full-time job. However, in the absence of my professional career, I've discovered and developed many other aspects of my life. I write and podcast about living with MS. It's not easy, but I love doing it.

I provide my wife support and career advice, and the children call me “Teacher Daddy” because I'm always there to help them with homework or study for a test. And whenever I find enough energy, I love to bring smiles to my family's tummies with my baking.

I'll always have my career memories, from paperboy to product manager... but now I look forward to forging new paths and experiences.

And the best part is, no slacks or stuffy buttons down shirts are required.