

Consider Unbundling Your Life a Bit

Theory-of-Change Symposium

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[John Lande](#) encourages you to make conscious decisions about your professional life out of choice, not habit, to maximize your personal and professional fulfillment. He is the Isidor Loeb Professor at the University of Missouri School of Law.

I am a failure. At retirement, that is. Or so everyone teases me.

I have ranted and raved about the [common misconception that there are only two choices: working full-time or no-time](#).

Actually, there may be a lot of choices, depending on one's resources and commitments.

I am fortunate to be able to live without a salary because I have an actual retirement plan and I get the benefits of Social Security and Medicare. Of course, not everyone is so fortunate.

In any case, most of us can make some choices, even when employed full time. So my general suggestion is to apply [Michael Lang's advice to make decisions out of choice, not habit](#). He was referring to decisions about interventions as a practitioner and I suggest doing the same in our personal and professional lives generally.

In my case, it would be more accurate to say that I have retired from teaching, faculty meetings, and lots of other things involved in being a good law school citizen. So while it may appear from the outside that I am busier than ever, that's because you can't see all the space in my life that *used to be filled* with teaching classes, grading papers, attending meetings, etc., etc.

Many of us are familiar with the concept of unbundling legal services. It's the idea that clients can retain lawyers to handle certain specified aspects of a case instead of handling the entire case. It's like ordering à la carte at a restaurant instead of a fixed seven-course meal.

You might find it helpful to think about unbundling your life by deciding what you want to do and, especially, what you *don't* want to do. Obviously, there are constraints and we almost never have complete discretion, but you may have more than you assume.

For those of us at or nearing retirement age with the ability to forego all or part of our employment income, these decisions are more obvious. Some people teach one semester a year instead of two. Some teach half-time all year. Some let go of writing, administrative, or other obligations. Some prefer to continue working full-time til they drop. There are comparable options outside of academia. Some people “retire” but continue working part-time as consultants for their former employers and/or others. This is not an exhaustive list of possibilities by any means.

Even if you aren’t anywhere near ready to retire and, indeed, are raring to go at exciting work projects, you still may be able to make some choices about what to do with your time. I think of an extremely productive colleague who goes crazy at times because of everything she has agreed to do.

The lesson is to be ready to say “no.” It can be even harder to say “no” to yourself than to others when you are presented with exciting opportunities. I get it. I have been there. Even though I am allegedly “retired,” I still struggle with this at times.

Sometimes, the best choice is to be overloaded for a specified, limited time. However, that’s not a good strategy all the time if you can avoid it. Think about what you might not do and carefully scrutinize your assumptions about what you need to do and the consequences of not doing some things.

Less can be more. If you reduce the quantity of things you do, you may be able to increase the quality of the things that you do. And you may have more time for the important activities of smelling the coffee, roses, or whatever else safely turns you on.

Unbundling your life also provides the opportunity to consider what more or different things you might want to do as part of the dispute resolution movement. This is hard.

Most of us already have too many things on our plates in our personal and professional lives. Since you are reading this, you probably already devote significant time to our field. In developing the [Stone Soup Project](#), we were very conscious of this fact and suggested ways that faculty could incorporate Stone Soup into their teaching with little or no additional effort – and that colleagues could invest more time if desired.

If you feel called to do more, especially recognizing the need for an [all-hands-on-deck strategy for dispute resolution](#), you might consider if you want to discontinue some activities so that you have room in your life for others.

I recently saw the acronym YOLO – you only live once – which is susceptible to different interpretations. Some people may use it to suggest letting go of some responsibilities to enjoy life more; there is merit in that perspective. A complementary perspective is that we have only one life to fulfill our aspirations.

YOLO.