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TRANSITION

# Looking for Inspiration: Where Do You Start?

Kevin McGoff

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Inspiration is needed before modifying a career, be it lawyering or some other life's work endeavor. Thinking about streamlining a mature law practice by eliminating the type of work you are no longer attacking with gusto? Perhaps afternoon long traffic court sessions, drafting simple wills, knocking out Chapter 7 bankruptcies, or endless evening town council meetings no longer hold the allure they did in your early days in the game. Maybe the Big One has crossed your mind. The "R" word – retirement – a transition lawyers don't much talk about publicly.

Whether you are contemplating a dramatic life change, or a more subtle transition, it won't just happen. You need to search. Often inspiration, the idea that supplies the spark that can set you in motion, is found in an unlikely corner of your life.

Information bombards us from multiple fronts. Sorting through it can be overwhelming. Aside from media sources and our computer, we absorb data from our daily exposure to people and events. Buried in the barrage of material we soak up every day are snippets that really grab our attention, pique our interest to learn more, and move us to act. What will inspire you to take a course of action?

I found inspiration from tales of old guys as well as a thirty-year-old woman. We may even learn a thing or two from the people living in our own homes. It's never too late to get started. We just have to get off our duffs, as my dad would say.

You may be inspired by anyone, anything, and anywhere. Here are some ideas that may resonate and encourage you to get a move on with your transition ideas.

## **You Can Re-Invent Yourself at Age 60**

A few years ago, I developed an interest in the work of Marcel Pagnol, an accomplished Frenchman born in 1895 and raised in Marseille. I was familiar with his books and some of his movies. However, my interest in learning more about Pagnol was piqued when I discovered how this fellow reinvented himself in his sixth decade on the planet. I was closing in on my 60s myself when I discovered how Pagnol began yet another career at about that same point in his life.

As a young man, Pagnol was a teacher writing plays in his spare time. He became a successful and well-known playwright in 1920s Paris. Pagnol foresaw talking pictures becoming popular, so he switched gears. He became a famous director, bringing to the screen—and a much wider audience—some of the plays that had made him famous at the outset of his career.

The playwright-turned-movie-producer and studio head was age 62 when a friend asked him to put to paper for *Elle Magazine* some of the stories about his youth that he had told around the dinner table. The magazine's first edition with Pagnol's short story flew off the shelves. The serialized story of his summers spent in the hills around Marseille gained broad interest. He acted on this success. Pagnol developed the short stories into a two-volume memoir. He capped his late-in-life literary career with two more books, published when he was 67 years old. The works became classics and have twice been made into movies. He even had two books published posthumously.

Pagnol changed gears. He dove into a project that grabbed his attention when he was 62 years old, put pen to paper, and became an author. Marcel Pagnol added to his legacy in a field that was new to him at an age when some folks are napping after a round of golf.

## **You Can Transition at Age 30, Too**

I attended a cabaret performance of Broadway Star Jessica Vosk. During her show she told the audience her story. Vosk had a successful career in finance, with the stress and financial rewards that accompany a position on Wall Street. One day she stumbled on a note her grandmother had written to her with a brief message, "Jessica, I wish you a lot of luck." That moment was the catalyst for Jessica Vosk to switch gears.

Vosk decided that she needed to make a change. She went to her boss and told him she had to take her life in a different direction. She cut back her hours and began singing at open-mic nights

in bars and clubs around Manhattan. Eventually she left her job in finance, began auditioning, and ultimately was offered a role in a show at Carnegie Hall. Her career as a singer and actor took off.

Vosk was thirty years old when she landed her first gig on Broadway in *Bridges of Madison County*. She went on to roles in *Finding Neverland* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. These parts led to Jessica being cast as Elphaba, the green witch in the Broadway production of *Wicked*. Her grandmother's note provided Jessica Vosk inspiration to change careers.

## **It's Never Too Late**

Here is a story for those of you who are saying, "I've waited too long. I can't switch gears at this point in my life. It is what it is." The late U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens was born in 1920. He was appointed to the Supreme Court by President Gerald Ford in 1975. Justice Stevens retired from the Court in 2010 when he was 90 years old. After he retired, he authored three books. His last work was published at age 99.

"Old" as it pertains to a person is a relative term. It is not necessarily a function of one's chronological age. Old can be difficult to define. We know old when we see it. When is one old?

There is no reason to allow age to determine what you can accomplish.

Of course, physical limitations apply. I could never dunk a basketball. I never even touched the rim, so I ruled out Lawyers League basketball as a hobby. If you think you want to climb a mountain and are out of breath walking a mile, modify your goal. Or better yet, train for it.

My mom lived to be 91 years old. When the topic of age came up, she was quick to chime in that, "age is just a number." She was right. Your stage in life is not a roadblock to making changes unless you allow it to be.

## **Yes - You Can Make That Change**

There's no 'Old Guys Rule' T-shirt in my closet. It's a clever phrase. It sells T-shirts and probably tattoos. I doubt I will ever buy one and there is no ink in my arm's future. There is a message in the slogan. What I glean from the phrase is that old guys and old girls can rule—as in rule their lives.

I hit a point in life when I began to marvel at what I once considered to be “old guys” had done—when they were “old guys.” As I stewed about not writing that book on legal ethics I should have done when I was 50, I discovered Marcel Pagnol started his writing career in his 60s. John Paul Stevens was writing books well into his ninetieth decade.

How did they do it? Why are they different than me—or you—or anyone else who aspires to do something different? The answer is simple. Like the singer-actress that walked away from Wall Street and changed careers, and the French playwright-filmmaker who picked up a pen at age 62, they jumped out of bed one morning and got started. To begin we just need to take the plunge.

Inspiration can come from anyone, anything, and anywhere. Look around. You may see something that resonates and inspires you to get moving toward your transition to whatever dream you're chasing.

*This article is adapted from Kevin McGoff's forthcoming book, [Find Your Landing Zone: Life Beyond the Bar](#) (©2023 American Bar Association), to be published in August 2023.*

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## Authors



### **Kevin McGoff**

Indianapolis, IN

Kevin McGoff retired from the practice of law and adopted the life of voyager, author, speaker, and travel writer. Kevin and his wife, Patty, divide their time between Indianapolis and near Avignon in the South of France. You will find Kevin at [kevin.mcgoff1@gmail.com](mailto:kevin.mcgoff1@gmail.com).

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