



# *A Note from Executive Director, Vicki Hickman*

## **The Next Third: Why I'm Finally Making Time for Friendship (and Margaritas)!**

Last week, I turned 59. Yep—fifty-nine. That means I'm rounding the corner into what I've officially dubbed "My Next Third," which spans ages 60 to 90. (Optimistic? Maybe. Delusional? Possibly. But I'm going with it.) Thankfully, I'm cruising into this next chapter in pretty good shape—at least when it comes to the wellness checklist: physical, emotional, intellectual, occupational, and spiritual. I've been paying attention. Stretching, thinking, working, reflecting. Gold stars all around!

But there's one category where I've been flunking spectacularly: social wellness.

Now don't get me wrong—I like people. I really like people. I wouldn't be in this field if I didn't. But outside of work? My inner circle is more of a triangle. I've never been someone with a big social calendar, and the truth is, that pattern goes all the way back to childhood. We moved constantly thanks to my dad's military career. New school, new friends, rinse and repeat. You learn quickly that most connections are temporary, and you stop trying quite so hard. I eventually put down roots, but that early habit stuck.

Fast forward to adulthood, and my friendships have had to compete with a very needy companion—my job. I've been lovingly referred to as a "workaholic" (and by lovingly, I mean slightly exasperatedly). Most of my friends have lifestyles with a little more margin, which makes their persistence in texting, calling, and Facebook-messaging me all the more impressive. I'm lucky to have two ride-or-die friends who keep checking in and planning things, no matter how often I bail with, "Can we reschedule?"

But something shifted last week. For my birthday, Todd (my husband and extrovert-in-residence) and I took a 7-night Celebrity Cruise. It was fabulous—sun, sea, zero cell service. While waiting for an excursion in Cozumel, we sat down next to another couple. Todd, doing what he does best, started chatting with them. (I was halfway through my second mimosa.)

And just like that—we made new friends. Her name is Ileana, and she's ten years older than I am. Our birthdays? One day apart. Her husband Bert is ten years older than Todd. Their birthdays? Two days apart. I won't say what happened when two Geminis started comparing horoscopes, but let's just say we're lucky the ship didn't reroute. We kept running into them, spending more time together, and by the end of the cruise...we'd booked another one together for next year. Thank you, Universe.

Since they live in Florida, we're keeping in touch via Facebook, cruise countdowns, and the occasional "look what I'm eating" photo exchange.

That trip reminded me of something important: social connections aren't just a bonus in life—they're vital. And they don't have to be complicated. You sit down next to someone, say hello, and let the rest unfold. But you do have to make space for it.

So here's my personal commitment: I'm going to be more intentional about my friendships. I want my people to know they matter—and that I deeply appreciate how they've kept me in the tribe even when I was lost in the work tunnel.

What's next? Vacation #2 in July with our friends Tim and Tammy (Todd and Tim have been friends since kindergarten!). We're headed to Hilton Head—our third trip together and a place we all love more than is probably healthy.

And then in September, the location is still TBD, but we're planning a trip with our longtime friends John and Julie. Julie and I go way back to high school, and we've been couple-friends since the '80s. (Insert big hair and cassette tapes here.)

So, cheers to friendship—old and new. To making space. To answering that text. To booking the trip. To margaritas on the beach and laughing until your face hurts. The Next Third is looking better already.

*-Vicki*