The Two-Month Wall

What nobody tells you about the first year

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A Note Before We Start

Paul and I both said it, more than once and louder than we should have, "I will never retire." Then the calendar started telling a different story, our friends started leaving their offices one retirement party at a time, and I started noticing a pattern that nobody had warned any of us about.

Almost everyone says the first few weeks are wonderful, honestly wonderful, the sleeping in and the coffee on the deck and the delicious feeling of a Monday that doesn't own you. Then somewhere around week eight, give or take, the phone gets quiet, the days get long in a way that isn't relaxing, and someone at a dinner party asks "so what do you do now?" and you hear yourself fumble the answer. I call that the two-month wall, and almost everyone I know has hit it, the CEOs and the founders and the people who swore they had a plan.

This guide is here because the wall isn't a sign you did retirement wrong, it's a sign you did your career right, so right that it shaped your days, your friendships, and the answer to who you are. You don't need to fear it, you need to see it coming, and you need some good company on the other side of it.

What the Wall Actually Is

The wall is the moment the vacation ends and the rest of your life begins, except nobody sends a memo, so it shows up disguised as boredom, restlessness, or a vague sense that you've misplaced something important and can't remember what.

For most of us it isn't one big crash, it's a slow pile-up of small quiet things, the email inbox that used to flood and now trickles, the meeting you weren't invited to because you don't work there anymore, the Tuesday with nothing on it that felt like freedom in March and feels like a question in May. None of it is a crisis, and that's what makes it sneaky, because you can keep yourself busy enough to avoid noticing for a long time.

Claude Says: Gerontologist Robert Atchley described retirement in phases back in the 1970s, and his model still holds up well. There's often a *honeymoon* stretch of rest and freedom, then a *disenchantment* phase when the novelty wears off and the loss of structure, status, and daily connection starts to register, then a *reorientation* phase where people build a new, realistic picture of their life, and finally a settled *routine* that actually fits. Not everyone moves through every phase or in that order, and the timing varies widely, but the dip after the honeymoon is common enough that it's worth planning for rather than being surprised by.

The good news, and I mean this, is that the wall is also the doorway, because it's usually the first time in decades you've had the room to ask what you actually want.

The Five Places the Wall Shows Up

If you took the readiness quiz, these will look familiar, because they're the same areas you scored. Read the ones where you landed lowest first, and give yourself credit for the ones where you didn't.

1. Identity: the dinner party question

For thirty or forty years, "what do you do?" had an easy answer, and it carried a lot of weight, your expertise, your standing, the reason people listened when you talked. When the title goes, the question stays, and a surprising number of capable people find themselves answering with what they *used* to do, which is a little like introducing yourself by your old address.

Field Work: Write three answers to "what do you do?" that don't mention a job, past or present. Try one out loud this week, at the grocery store or on a phone call, and notice how it feels to say.

2. Rhythm: the wide-open Tuesday

Your calendar used to be built for you, by clients and boards and the general noise of being needed, and now it's blank, which sounds like a dream until you realize that a blank calendar doesn't relax you, it just waits. People who ran on full schedules often find that total freedom turns into a kind of drift, and drift is exhausting in its own quiet way.

Field Work: Sketch one good week, not a perfect one, just good. Pick two anchors that happen every week no matter what, a standing coffee, a class, a walk with someone, and put them on the calendar like they're meetings, because they are.

3. Relevance: decisions made without you

This one stings the leaders most. The company keeps going, the team makes a call you wouldn't have made, and nobody asks your opinion, which is exactly what a good exit is supposed to produce, and it still hurts. Wanting to matter isn't vanity, it's human, and the work is figuring out *where* you want to matter now, instead of trying to keep mattering in a place you've left.

Field Work: List three things people have always come to you for, the advice, the skill, the way you see a problem. Then name one place outside your old work where that would be welcome, a nonprofit, a young founder, a neighbor, a grandkid.

4. Your Circle: the friends who go quiet

Work friends are real friends, until the work goes away and you find out how much of the friendship was the work. It isn't anyone's fault, it's just that shared context is the glue for a lot of relationships, and when the context disappears the calls slow down. Meanwhile the people at home may be adjusting to having you around a lot more, which deserves its own honest conversation.

Field Work: Name two work friendships you want to keep and invite each of them to something that has nothing to do with work. Then have one honest talk with the person closest to you about what this chapter should look like, for both of you.

5. Purpose: when the relief wears off

Relief is a wonderful feeling, and it's also a terrible plan, because relief runs out. For decades the mission was handed to you, by a company or a client list or a payroll you had to make, and finding a purpose of your own takes some wandering and some trying things that might not stick. That's not failure, that's elimination through experience, and it's how you find the thing that does stick.

Field Work: Write down five things you've said "someday" to. Pick the smallest one and do it before the end of the month, then tell someone you did it.

Back To Karen

The Piece Nobody Plans For: Your People

Here's what I've watched happen with leaders over and over, through years of running Canvas Creek Team Building and now through Nexters. The people who get over the wall fastest aren't the ones with the best plan, they're the ones who aren't climbing it alone.

That's different from having people who love you, and you probably have plenty of those. The people who love you will tell you to relax and enjoy it, which is sweet and not especially helpful when you're staring at a wide-open Tuesday wondering who you are now. What actually moves you forward is a handful of people who are living this same chapter, who understand the dinner party question because they fumbled it too, and who will cheer just as loudly when you finally sign up for that pottery class as they would have for your last big promotion.

That's the whole reason we built Nexters. It's a room full of accomplished, curious, slightly stubborn people figuring out their Nexts in real time, swapping what's working, admitting what isn't, and celebrating each other's wins, big ones and small ones and "I finally cleaned out the garage" ones. Nobody lectures, nobody sells you a portfolio, and nobody pretends this part is easy.

If you remember one thing from this guide, make it this. Forward is momentum enough, and it's a lot easier to find forward when you're standing next to someone who's going too.

Where to Go From Here

There's no single right next step, so here are a few, depending on how you like to move. Pick the one that fits, and if more than one fits, even better.

Come meet your people

The Nexters community is where the real conversations happen, with rooms for every style of Next, from the Rocket Room folks who want to build something new, to the Hammock crowd who've earned a long exhale, to Getting Ready for anyone still on their way out the door. Founding Member pricing is $65 a year until January 1, after which it goes to $97, and once you're in, you're in.

Join the Nexters community →

Work with me one-on-one

Some walls are easier to get over with a coach, especially if you're a leader or a founder who's used to being the one with the answers. I've worked with more than 80,000 people through Canvas Creek, and these days my favorite conversations are with people standing right where you are. A discovery call is free, about thirty minutes, and there's no pitch waiting at the end, just an honest conversation about what's next for you.

Book a free discovery call →

Still on your way out? Two guides that help

If you're still in the role, or still own the business, the work before you leave shapes everything after. I have two guides for exactly that, and you can ask for either one by emailing me at karen@nexters.life.

- **The Intentional Exit** is for executives and senior leaders planning a departure, covering the personal and professional side of leaving well, with a readiness assessment and a 90-day plan. Put "Intentional Exit" in the subject line.
- **Before You Let Go** is an exit journal for business owners and founders, for the part of letting go that a buy-sell agreement never covers. Put "Before You Let Go" in the subject line.

Questions for Your Journal

1. When someone asks "what do you do now?", what do I wish I could say?
2. What did I love about my work that had nothing to do with the title?
3. Which day of the week feels emptiest, and what would make it one I look forward to?
4. Who do I know who is living this same chapter, and when did I last really talk with them about it?
5. What is one Next, however small, I want to be able to celebrate thirty days from now?

You've spent a lifetime building something, and the building isn't over, it just changes shape. She's still going. He's still going. Are you going?

You deserve your Next.

Karen Grosz · Nexters · The Art of Living Forward · nexters.life

Karen told the stories. Claude helped build the structure. Because that's how we do things around here. Collaboratively.