

# Volunteering for the retired principal

Gary Ireland

Hoping for a long and healthy retirement? Why not consider volunteering?

There is strong statistical evidence that volunteers in general retain their faculties longer and live to a greater age. Most likely this is because volunteering provides you with interest and purpose, not to mention a social milieu (although not destroying brain cells by watching daytime television may also be a factor!).

The need for volunteers is great and encompasses many organisations, so people seeking to volunteer have a wide number of options. Consequently, it is possible to select a form of volunteering that well matches your skill set. And know this and know it well: teachers (especially principals and retired principals) possess a remarkable variety of skills, and it is therefore possible to involve yourself with an organisation which is outside your experience but for which school administration has equipped you to perform successfully.

For example, I was persuaded to sit on the Board of our local Meals on Wheels Service (and eventually served as Board Chairperson) without any experience of retailing other than working as a shop assistant as a student and flogging sausage sandwiches at sporting club and charity barbecues. In addition, I also had absolutely no experience of working with frail aged people, but I brought to my role (amongst other things):

- An ability to read a balance sheet
- Experience in negotiating with and preparing funding submissions for government
- Secretarial skills
- The ability to chair meetings efficiently and fairly
- A knowledge of Workplace Health and Safety
- Conflict resolution skills
- An ability to manage the media, both for publicity and crisis management
- Experience in interviewing
- An ability to develop and monitor strategic plans.

This is an impressive list, but what school principal cannot say the same?

You may discover that one area of volunteering is not enough, and you will almost certainly find that there are several organisations approaching you for your services, especially in the years immediately following your retirement. In addition to my Meals on Wheels position, at my busiest I was also secretary of my church and of a local government 355 committee, on the Board of my rotary club, and I also superintended a youth driver education program for local schools.

I must add that I have never regretted any of it. Indeed, in truth, I have loved it all. It has eased the difficult transition from rooster to feather duster, providing me with a sense of purpose, new learning and congenial colleagues.

I will conclude with a few cautions:

- Don't over-commit yourself. There will be many calls on your abilities, but if you answer all of them, you will not have time to do every one of them well and your family life will suffer.
- If you find the form of volunteering you have undertaken does not suit you, get out, but try some other form.
- Know your use-by date. Your peak usefulness to any organisation is your first five or six years after retiring, because you still have contacts from your working life and a recent knowledge of procedures and legislation. After this it goes into a slow decline, as does your physical fitness. Now retired for thirteen years, I have cut back in the last three or four, but I am happy to say that there are some things for which I still come in handy!

### Contributor details

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Gary was Principal of Camden High from 1995-2006. Since retiring he has volunteered in various capacities in his community. He has travelled extensively around NSW and to Malaysia to keep up with his eleven grandchildren, developed friendships with Japanese in Kashiwa, written short stories which never get published, and been very active in the life of his church. He is the father of two school Principals.