

# What I did to prepare for retirement – less tension, more pension

Sean Bowen

This is a personal account of what I did so that my transition to retirement would be smooth for me, my family and for our school. This will not apply to everyone as we are all different and our schools are all different – but it has worked for me.

The main goal was to not go 'cold turkey'. I have seen many people, at all levels, have great difficulty retiring because they go from Principal to person and haven't thought about the impact this has on their daily life. All of a sudden your first few waking hours aren't bombarded with people and programs and you are no longer leading from the front but from the armchair. This change in routine and status can be very difficult to adjust to if you aren't ready.

I was a principal for ten years in a school of 1100-1200 students and a relieving principal in two other schools over a two year period. I have been retired for two years and it is the best career move I have ever made. As you can imagine this kept me very busy and I enjoyed every minute of it. I don't miss school but I do miss the interactions with staff and students. It is these interactions and what you do next that make the difference in your retirement.

## The school

I was fortunate to be in a school where the staff was fully committed to their profession and this allowed a plan that started three years before my retirement.

Firstly I told our two Deputies that I had three years left and I felt they should both be principals and ready for that position before I go, for their development and for public education.

Our plan was that over this period of time I would progressively hand over more and more of the school to them as leaders. This involved a lot of trust but more importantly a strong focus on the growth of the school.

One Deputy didn't want to become Principal because this person also had three years left until their retirement, while the other person did want to move to that position. This worked well for the school.

This wasn't a case of making me redundant over three years as it put me on a different level again in terms of capacity building and concentrating on that area across the school.

We were at a point where a new three year plan was to be developed and we decided to build two three year plans with me as an adviser and the Deputies as the leaders of this process.

This was then filtered down to Head Teachers. We had a number that wanted to be Deputies and others who wanted to remain as Head Teachers but take greater leadership roles in the school and they were put in the process as the Deputies started raising the leadership components of all Head Teachers.

The Head Teachers were then charged with looking for teachers who wanted greater leadership roles. As with the HTs there were many teachers who wanted to be Head Teachers and others who wanted to remain as classroom teachers but become better teachers as well as taking more leadership within the school.

This process was simply called capacity building and it is what all leaders should do anyway as it is to the benefit of public education.

It worked for us and all staff had greater ownership of the school and this was reflected in our reputation and external evaluations by a private company. It also resulted in one Principal, four Deputies and 11 Head Teachers appointed to other schools. When I retired it really was a matter of walking out the door knowing the school was in safe hands and was continually developing.

It is important to remember that it is not your school, you are the guardian.

## **Me**

As I said earlier, I loved my job but I was not married to it and had many other interests in my life.

My advice is to *not wait* until you retire to start new things and have more interests. Do them now because you will be able to do a lot more with these interests when you actually do retire, i.e. you will be able to do a lot more of what you already do.

My interests are varied and I have found that I can now concentrate on these much more and find other areas to be involved in as well.

I always enjoyed thoroughbred horses and racing (and many times I have contributed to the retired bookmakers' fund). Now I can go whenever I want to city and country races and for my sins I also own a share in a horse. I have renewed contact with old friends with similar interests.

I used to make stained glass windows as a hobby and now I can spend many hours doing this again.

I play bass guitar and can now do this more often and get out to see lots of musicians.

I regularly walk six to eight kilometres every day listening to music. This keeps me fit.

We have always travelled and now we continue that and can do all our planning ourselves. The best part is being able to travel out of peak season.

For my other sins we bought a border collie. This means lots of walking and running and training.

I have found that I can spend more time on the house and garden and a lot more time with friends.

I have found that it is OK to read a book at two o'clock in the afternoon and not feel guilty. The same thing applies to going to the movies. It was OK to let your mind wander (but mind you, sometimes it just buggered off completely)!

The one thing that really makes a difference is having a routine to your day just as you did at school.

Interestingly enough you will find that you become busier and busier and still need to keep a diary.

Your week will be turned around as you realise that during the week is the best time to do things because weekends are too crowded with working people having their weekend.

On a professional level I work part time for two universities supervising prac teachers, I run workshops at another uni and I mentor beginning teachers at a public school. This keeps me up to date but importantly lets me use my experience and pass it on to future teachers.

I found that mentally I was shutting the door on one life experience (school) but opening it to many other areas.

With finances I am in the old scheme super so that was never an issue but we did make sure we had a savings plan so that when we both retired we would not be hamstrung by money worries. If you haven't been to a financial adviser you should do so sooner than later.

Plan ahead, think of what you want out of retirement and think about how you want to leave the school. It is a big change. If anyone wants to talk to me I would be only too pleased to share all of this in detail.

## **Contributor details**

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Sean was Principal of Cecil Hills High School from 2005 to 2015. He has a wide range of interests and still works part time in education at universities and schools.