

Managing Retirement: How to avoid moving from the penthouse to the basement overnight

Frank Stanton

After 38½ years with the Department and 17 of these as a Principal, retirement always seemed to be something in the distant future. Retirement from a career that we love is different and very personal for each of us – and yet I am sure that there are so many experiences that we all have in common. With this in mind, I would like to share some of the aspects of my preparation and management for retirement.

I once had a retired colleague tell me that retirement is like moving from the penthouse to the basement overnight. Before retirement we are busy and productive. People seek our opinion and we exercise influence. Money wasn't spent until we signed the cheques and things didn't happen without our approval. He went on to explain that after retirement, the school moves on and we become the average Joe Blow.

Thinking about my colleague's comment made me reflect often about the important things that I would like to achieve both professionally and personally prior to and after retirement.

My professional priority was to maintain a 100% effort right to the very end and leave the school in the best possible shape for my successor.

Fortunately for me and most of my colleagues, preparing for retirement did not require a great deal of financial planning. Other than salary packaging extra superannuation, I was happy to rest on my laurels and be content with my defined benefits SSS Pension. I feel for those who commenced teaching after the SSS Scheme was abolished and who will no doubt need to plan more carefully regarding their financial situation and/or work past 60 years of age.

Preparing for retirement also involved constructing a rock-solid roadmap for the future. It involved more than just a bucket list. It was more a plan of achieving and experiencing the really important things in life – of which success at a career that I loved was just one part. Spending as much time as possible with my wife, children, grandchildren and with my elderly parents was the main part of this but other parts of the roadmap included keeping in touch with other relatives, pursuing hobbies, keeping fit, reading, travelling and possibly, further study just for the fun of learning.

Managing retirement involves acting out our roadmap and making negotiated adjustments when appropriate.

At the end of the day, retirement is just another phase of our lives. Just like school, university, getting married, raising a family and having grandchildren, retirement is just another of life's chapters. However it is the most wonderful and rewarding time of our lives and enacting that roadmap more than compensates for the loss of identity resulting from no longer being in a formal position of educational leadership. Retirement is yet another milestone in exploring that incredibly mysterious, unpredictable and wonderful adventure called life.

Part time casual work has also been of great benefit to me. Presiding Officer for HSC exams at a local high school and supervising pre-service teachers with the local university have been very enjoyable and given me a sense of wellbeing. Along with other exercise, playing terrible golf twice a week also helps to keep me fit and has provided me with a great sense of resilience. (Why do I persist with this cruel game?)

I wish all of my retired and soon-to-be retired colleagues every happiness with this most fulfilling time of our lives.

Contributor Details

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Frank was Principal at Orara High School (Coffs Harbour) from 2009 to April 2015. Prior to that, he was Principal at Norfolk Island Central School, Westport High School (Port Macquarie) and Nyngan High School. Since retiring, Frank has worked part time at Southern Cross University supervising pre-service teachers. He has also worked in schools teaching mathematics and mentoring aspiring leaders.