

# **Too Few Good Men**

Author: Todd Brandon

Several years ago, I was teetering on the brink of having to retire from a job I dearly loved. A habitual workaholic, I was definitely NOT happy with my life at that moment.

I don't play golf well and am a lousy fisherman. Terrible at bridge. I played baseball as a younger man, but those days are long gone. I like to read, I work out at the YMCA, and I like to write. There is no way, however, that those activities can replace full time employment! So, I was at loose ends and wracking my brain for what to do in my retirement years.

## **Evolution of a Retiree**

Once we moved "back home" to retire, I looked around for part time jobs, but nothing attracted my interest.

Then I thought, "Maybe I should jump into the not-for-profit field and see if volunteer work can fill my days." (I wasn't even thinking back then about "fulfilling" my life – just filling my days.) Then I spotted a sign in front of an office saying "Retired Senior Volunteer Program or RSVP". It presented itself as kind of a "clearing house" or "placement bureau" for seniors who were interested in volunteerism.

On a whim, I stopped in and was interviewed as a possible candidate for jobs they had available from the area's charitable agencies. None of the jobs discussed at that meeting particularly fired me up, so I decided to do some "sampling" to see if anything made me want to stick with it.

A retired marketing manager, I lent my marketing skills to an organization that trains lay people to act as advocates for underprivileged children involved in court cases. In fact, I took their 30-hour advocate training course. Then I created several marketing vehicles for them, but found I am not cut out for the kind of advocacy work needed to succeed in litigations. After a year or so, I dropped out of that group and looked elsewhere.

I started running the food bank at the Salvation Army once a week and answered a call for someone to man the front desk in the city police department another half day.

By that time, RSVP had tapped me to serve on their Advisory Council, so I dove full bore into their activities. I did Santa Letters, annual recognition dinner planning, putting on a fund-raising "Taste of" event, acting the part of a giant "hand" in hygiene-teaching sessions for K and 1<sup>st</sup> graders, etc.

Then I started “mentoring” 1-2-3 grade kids in our school systems, helping them read and spell while working to better their whole situation in life. This activity became the one I truly fell in love with. I have now cut back most other activities, enabling me to focus on this mentoring gig. I now have four kids in four different schools, mentoring them under the auspices of three different mentoring programs. I love it!

So, my advice to anyone who retires and wants to remain active is to get involved in several charitable activities until you find the one(s) that suit you.

### **A Vacuum That Needs Filling**

During my first RSVP Advisory Council meeting, I noted that men were definitely a minority in the room. As I got into other charities, I began to feel I was the “token man” among flocks of females.

I have witnessed the dedicated work ethic that scores of talented women put into charity work. There is a reason an entity like the Red Cross features female nurses in their ads – charitable organizations are heavily female populated. Women are the backbone of their teams and the real leaders at the forefront of charity work.

Why are there not more men in the demographic of senior volunteers? I have heard a myriad of reasons why – and I don’t buy any of them! Women live longer. There are more women than men. Women flock to charity work to fulfill their strong mothering instincts. Women’s hearts bleed faster than men’s. Posh! That’s absurd!

If these reasons are not valid, then what’s keeping retired men away from the rewarding world of volunteerism? Well, a lot more men than women play golf. Men work hard all their lives to earn the privilege of playing golf all day. (Huh!) They take up woodworking, travel, remodeling, gardening, tennis, hunting, fishing, etc., etc. They “have no time” for charity work. Some think it is “beneath” them and is taken up only by people who have “nothing else to do.”

Frankly, I don’t buy any of these so-called reasons.

Whatever the reason(s) why senior men are so far behind senior women in active participation in their community’s volunteer activities, such men should re-evaluate them, as they are missing a host of rich, rewarding activities that can greatly enhance their quality of life. For men who are used to being active, driving toward goals, making things happen on the job and seeing the fruits of their labor, volunteer work offers wonderful payback to those who get in there and participate.

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**The rewards of cutting a stroke off your golf handicap or raising a prize-winning orchid cannot hold a candle to the rewards you get from brightening some child's outlook on life or seeing the thankfulness of some shut-in to whom you have wheeled a meal!**

**A major cause of restlessness among retired men is the fact that their minds are seldom challenged anymore, since they left the workplace. Golf, tennis, tread milling, etc. don't challenge the mind and neither do some volunteer positions.**

**Ah, but mentoring young children – now here's a charitable activity that not only challenges your mind, but also your heart! Among all the retirement choices, I've found this one the most personally rewarding one (along with the many Angel Tree activities that need your help). These activities are like having a whole new set of grand children to play with! AND THERE ARE NOT NEARLY ENOUGH MEN ENJOYING THEM!**

**Retired Men: Reactivate your life by calling the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) at 812-948-1815. They coordinate the activities of over 1,200 volunteers in Southern Indiana and can help you match up with the ones you'll enjoy the most!**