

EXECUTIVE BRIEFINGS BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT: POST RETIREMENT

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A bigger purpose

Our identities in life, as our relationships, are usually shaped by the things we do at work. We enjoy the authority and challenge that these bring and our work becomes the primary focus of our lives. Clearly, everybody enjoys a leisurely break but a permanent one can be daunting. Retirement comes with a set of challenges that few are prepared for, often because we are so busy with the management of situations, frequently crises, at work that there is really no opportunity to plan properly for a post retirement situation. Therefore, when it happens, we are at sea about what to do.

Most commonly, senior executives look to remain involved in some sort of professional capacity such as an advisory role, independent directorship or even full time consulting. This is logical because we are ordinarily more comfortable in a corporate work environment having spent our best years there. It gives us a sense of respect and possibly purpose. Essentially, we can then claim we have things to do, a distraction from home, recognition and even some sort of income. But the sad reality is that things are never quite the same again. Authority goes and with it access to office infrastructure, a secretary, the scaffolding of support systems and most significantly daily engagements with peers and youngsters. Life can become slow with long days giving way to evenings with hours and hours of nothing to do.

There is no single solution that applies to everyone. The important thing is to begin thinking about it a couple of years before the fingers snap. Life is a lot more than work; there is a world out there where pursuing dozens of varied interests are possible. Travel, photography, grandchildren are the usual suspects. But they cannot always provide a telling purpose. Perhaps the nicest thing we can do is to give back to society by helping others. Our experience over the years can then be put to the best possible use. It also brings with it a unique sense of fulfilment only possible in the caring of others.

Whilst the world has many notable examples of people who dedicate their post retirement years to special causes, I am compelled to share a snippet about Devendra Raj Mehta. Born in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, Mr Mehta had a distinguished career in government, as Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank and subsequently Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India. Despite such distinct levels of professional accomplishments, this is mostly not what he is known or will be remembered for. In 1975, whilst serving in the Rajasthan government, following a terrible accident in Jaisalmer and a life changing experience, Mr Mehta set up the Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti to coincide with the 2500th anniversary of a great Jain saint who preached compassion, non-violence and equality of all beings. The organisation is now the world's largest provider of artificial limbs, callipers and other aid appliances free of cost and over a million people have been fitted with what is known as the *Jaiipur Foot*. Mr Mehta dedicates himself to this cause, which has empowered the provision of a better life to others.

It is true that an inner call and consequently passion that drives Mr Mehta are uncommon attributes. But the rest of us in our own way can do things that encourage others and benefit society. These could do with dedicating our time to organisations involved in health, education, conservation, protection of animals etc. This provides an enriching experience beyond what is professionally possible. Everybody cannot become a Devendra Mehta, but in our own small way we can at least make a difference to others. Post retirement life can bring with it the opportunity of a bigger purpose than a corner office ever could.