

Life After Retirement

It was 1988, and I was in the twilight of my career after twenty seven years at the Avondale (PA) division of Hewlett Packard (HP). On three separate occasions I had served as R&D Computer Systems Manager. Between those assignments I was allowed to work alone on whatever captured my interest. My most important product development contributions occurred during these periods.



The modus operandi for product development for HP had evolved to a formal set of required development steps. I felt like a square peg in a round hole in this environment. We were in a severe recession, and HP offered a generous early retirement incentive to reduce the number of employees. I was happy to help them achieve this reduction.

About a week after my retirement I had a call from HP asking me if I was interested in being a consultant. I was, and I signed a consulting contract agreement at the rate of \$50 per hour. In 1988 that was a very good rate.

A gas chromatograph is an instrument used for the analysis of a huge number of chemicals and compounds. The HP Avondale division manufactures these instruments and ancillary devices. Displaying these devices at trade shows was an important part of the marketing effort. One such show was the Pittsburgh Conference On Analytical Chemistry and Applied Spectroscopy (Pitcon). By the time of my retirement it had outgrown the available hotel space in Pittsburgh and was moved to New Orleans.

My first project as a consultant was the development of a computer system to record, organize and store customer contact information so that the information could be transmitted to the regional sales managers. At the conclusion of the Pitcon in New Orleans thirteen thousand inquiries were in the computer data base I had created. I was asked to return to Pitcon the following year to be present in case there were problems. There were none.

Another project was the development of a humongous spreadsheet template to be used for transmitting the annual budget requests by the twenty or so individual departments at Avondale.

For several months I was heavily involved in testing a new product based on a desktop computer which was a precursor of the PCs of today. The

young lady who was developing the mathematical software became very nervous whenever she saw me walking toward her desk.

When my consultation services were no longer needed, I developed a modest business in Desktop Publishing. I did many illustrated documents for realtors plus newsletters for a country club and the West Chester Area Senior Center. For eight years I taught a computer course at the senior center.

The era described above ended in 2002 when Mary and I moved to Granite Farms Estates (GFE), a retirement community in Media, PA. My computer is still one of my best friends. I have done several significant desktop publishing projects for the GFE staff. I am still writing and producing a quarterly newsletter which is mailed to family members of Assisted Living residents.

Looking Back

As a manager, I think I was a very effective leader and motivator. My subordinates were productive and loyal. As an administrator, I had trouble rising to the level of mediocrity, and administrative details became increasingly important as time passed. I was able to make a lot of significant technical and product contributions, and this knowledge is some source of satisfaction.

What I really feel good about, though, is the large number of people I was able to help during those years. In some cases, it was simply physical assistance. For some it was words of encouragement, a sympathetic ear, or giving lunchtime algebra lessons for technicians.

For others it was being able to assist in a significant career boost. For still others it was just a matter of treating them with dignity. In one case, it was to help a recovering alcoholic put his life back in order.

When I ponder on these things, I am at peace with myself.