



**Golden Boomers:  
Creating a Second Midlife for Meaning and Money**

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## Chapter 4

# VALUABLE TIME, SPENT VALUABLY

by Diane DeSimone

### Abstract

As people enter their Golden Boomer years, many look for a worthwhile way to spend their valuable time. Volunteering can open many doors for people to new friendships, new interests, and even new jobs. Teaching can offer a golden boomer a satisfying means of sharing life experiences in such a way as to enrich the future lives of those just about to enter the workforce fulltime. This is a brief story of the author's path through a lifetime of volunteering in a variety of interest groups, and how that path eventually led to a fulfilling teaching position. The author adds the caveats a golden boomer needs to be aware of in order to set the appropriate expectations and avoid disappointments along the way.

A number of years ago, I heard a speaker announce that the most precious commodity that continues to increase in value is Time. It is the one thing of which everyone has a limited supply. His point was that anyone who could create a product that saves people time would make his fortune easily. Nonetheless, his premise holds especially true for those thinking of career opportunities as they enter the "golden years" of 60 and beyond. What are the best choices for spending our most precious commodity in ways that create value for ourselves and others? For me, I have found such value in the roles of volunteering and teaching.

Let's look at volunteering first, since for me, that is how I discovered the position of teaching. There are abundant opportunities for volunteering for short term tasks or longer term roles that are related to your interests and expertise. The key is to get truly involved in whatever activity you decide to volunteer for. Simply attending meetings and passively listening to others report on their actions never inspired me. I need to get actively into the work to find the value. I began volunteering at a young age, and never thought of it as volunteering. In high school, I served as president of the local Horizon Club, the high school section of Campfire Girls. I learned a great deal from the experience that stayed with me throughout my life. Things such as – even a non-profit organization has to make enough money from planned events to cover the cost of the event; public speaking can be fun if you happen to be the only expert in the room on the specific subject; and, very important, people will work very hard to make a special event such as a Christmas dance absolutely

wonderful if they are appreciated and recognized for their efforts. Later in my corporate career, I continued volunteering as a way to pursue subjects of interest to me that my corporate position didn't offer any other way. Being a mentor in a sponsorship program at a local business school helped me stay in touch with the academic world that I enjoyed. Chairing the international committee for a national engineering conference helped me network with peers in other companies and build my experience in interfacing with international visitors. Giving presentations at industry symposiums forced me to take the time to research and learn new technologies and new subjects to keep up with the developments in my industry.

When I left the corporate world, I was terrified of being left behind. What if I became isolated? What if I was out of touch and became obsolete? Of course, they are silly fears since I now realize that you only become isolated and obsolete if you, yourself, want to. But, assuming I didn't want to, how could I "stay connected"? Volunteering was, once again, a solution for me. A small paragraph in the church bulletin said that the pastor was recruiting a few people to start a stewardship committee. I wasn't sure what that meant, but it was an opportunity to meet people with whom I shared a common bond; and so – I volunteered. The committee was formed with eight people. We studied stewardship, hosted a couple of ministry fairs, worked with the pastor to coordinate the activities of the various councils, and, perhaps most important, built friendships. Eventually, the pastor left, the direction changed, the members changed, and I moved on; but the friendships remain.

When I eventually started my own business, I once again needed a way to connect with others in the industry I was venturing into. I joined the local chapter of the trade industry association. Once again, not satisfied with just attending chapter meetings, I happily accepted a place on the Board of the local group. Over time, I served as a vice president and then president of the local group which gave me a place on the Board of the regional chapter. Eventually, I served as the secretary and then Vice President of the regional chapter which gave me a place on the Board of the State chapter. Working as a volunteer in the association, I gained the advantage of wonderful education about the industry, technical information on new methods and materials, changes in legal and regulatory requirements essential to my business, trends in the marketplace, and so on. I met people working in all aspects of the industry, and received support from peers, suppliers, and association staff.

Then the market crashed and my business dropped to nearly nothing. I had time to spend and very little income. At that point, the trade association student chapter representatives from one of the nearby universities

attended the association Board meeting. After the meeting, the faculty advisor mentioned that the school needed someone to teach a course in the coming semester. Through my contacts from serving on the Board, I got information about the teaching position and contacted the school. I had the knowledge to teach the course, and with my business in a slump, I also had the time to spend. Having been an adjunct teacher previously, I had enough teaching experience that the school accepted me as an adjunct.

The next Fall semester the market was still at a standstill. I still needed income. The university needed a full time instructor. I applied, and the school hired me for a full time position. Now, the experiences I have had coupled with my formal education as well as the industry specific education I received from the trade association all come together in the classroom and laboratory. Teaching at the university level is proving to be a wonderful next step for me. I am gaining a deeper, more precise understanding of technologies, methods, and even the business aspects of the industry in order to explain them to students. Working with the young people who are so eager to start their careers and so hopeful as they envision their futures is energizing. They challenge me to find interesting ways to add to their learning. They keep me abreast of the new trends in our society just by being themselves. They even raise my level of compassion as I see their struggles and day to day challenges. I believe I have gained a broader perspective on life in general because of the opportunity I have to be a teacher.

Volunteering and teaching have been valuable ways for me to spend my time. And I word that sentence very carefully – they have been valuable for me. For people entering their “golden years”, who have talents, knowledge, and experience to share, volunteering or teaching are excellent choices to answer what to do next. However, it is important to recognize that we do these things to bring value to ourselves. If a person expects overwhelming appreciation and gratefulness for volunteering, he or she will be quickly disappointed and disheartened. One has to keep in mind that when volunteering, he is working with other volunteers. Just as in any other environment – corporate, social, or personal – the people involved have their own opinions, their own needs, their own requirements and objectives. Volunteering brings value to the association, the end recipients, and ultimately society; but it has especially brought value into my own life.

In the same way, teaching has added to my life at this point in time. Once again, however, those in their golden years who are contemplating teaching must recognize the good and bad parts. Unless you are planning to apply for a tenure-track position in your field of formal education, you

will be brought in to teach as a lecturer or instructor. The best part about this is that your responsibility will be to simply teach. Lecturers are not caught in the famous “publish or perish” cycle that puts such pressure on tenure-track faculty to conduct research, publish white papers in appropriate journals, and most important, gain sizeable research grants. Consequently, a lecturer position provides the satisfaction of being able to share one’s knowledge and experience and hopefully, making an impact on a student’s future while still allowing the lecturer a sizeable amount of free time. It is not enough free time, however, for a second job. I tried maintaining a second job and teaching three courses and found it impossible. Preparing the classroom lecture or project, creating tests, holding office hours, grading homework and tests, and completing a surprising amount of paperwork takes all of my normal work time outside of the classroom.

It is important to understand this because, although teaching provides a steady income for three quarters of the year, the income is much less than what most people became used to in their corporate career. With my income currently at about 40 per cent of what it was during my peak earning years, I have had to scale back considerably. Of course, one can only divest of obligations down to a certain point. This is not a good market to sell a homestead if you are counting on the equity as a main portion of your retirement. You still need a vehicle to get back and forth to work. Utilities never go down – etc. etc. Therefore, teaching is an excellent choice of occupation for those entering their golden years if the financial situation works out. It is best to have scaled down to your expected retirement lifestyle, or have a fund that can supplement the income from teaching to maintain currency in your financial obligations before committing to a teaching position.

For me, volunteering and teaching have added value and been very satisfying at various times in my life. Staying involved with bright people of all ages; learning new concepts, ideas, technologies, and techniques; and feeling like I am making a contribution are all things that I have found to be very important to my personal happiness. I would recommend that others entering their golden years consider volunteering with a group that is related to their personal interests, and consider teaching as a way of sharing knowledge and experience. If your expectations are set correctly, I think you will find your time spent valuably.

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