

## **Editorial View**

### **Retired People: Don't Sell Them Short!**

by Gordon Gibby KX4Z

It is commonplace that amateur radio operators decry the “graying” of their community and of their emergency volunteers --- since so many people who take an active interest in their community and in this hobby are retired and visibly older.

However, this can be a **fantastic workforce** to have available to volunteer organizations. You just have to understand the retirees' situations, strengths and weaknesses, and then develop ways to integrate them.

“Paid Employees” may have a “lifespan” in any particular job of only a few years—there isn't any guarantee that a full-time, well-trained staffer will still “be there” five years from now! They may well have headed off to greener pastures, or followed a spouse far, far away.

A disadvantage of working with retired people is that they are no longer in a “structure” that helps catalog their overall skill and aptitude level --- the retired high-functioning CEO is in the same group and setting as the retired lower-level hard-working taxpayer. So you must be wise and skillful in recognizing the competency levels of your “workforce.” Further, as we age, we're all at risk for subtle declines in cognitive abilities – I know one superb leader who is careful to keep good records of skill demonstrations on all his volunteers, a mechanism that probably helps to spot problems early, and shift volunteers into their best service niche.

Strengths abound! Retired people often already have basic income/housing/subsistence issues well under control, and what they're looking for is SIGNIFICANCE. Especially those who show up to volunteer groups like ARES. While employed, they knew they were serving their community and making a difference for others; now retired, they yearn for that same feeling, just not 9-to-5 every day! So be sure to explain WHY you want them to develop skills, assets and strategies, and continuously point out the importance of the vision of amateur radio emergency communications to which you're drawing them.

Retired persons often have vast life experience. They've successfully dealt with all kinds of personalities, and may have also lived in a wide range of situations and climates --- they know to how make things liveable in a far wider domain than do fresh-out-of-college folks. Many of them are quite slick in how they deal with the rough edges of others --- so they can work with a wider range of colleagues than many.

Retired persons often have developed an incredible range of skills. While they may not be adept at MOSFET gate impedance matching or Smith Chart transmission line design, they may have worked in multiple different occupations and companies, from small to large. Further, they may have decades of experience managing and maintaining a home, lived through a blizzard of different weather conditions, survived multiple family tragedies, and worked through many “disaster” situations in their family. What we call “common sense” is much more “common” among this workforce.

So give this workforce your highest respect, offer them importance and significance in the context of graded-doses of service, accurately assess their individual skills and abilities, and find ways to fill in the gaps in their knowledge base to raise their capabilities to serve your community!