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A New AGenda

By Mitch Anthony

When Marie Ens turned 66 years old, the human resources director of her organization promptly informed her that their retirement policy required her to cease her labors at this age. Marie was not your average worker at the everyday corporation, however. She was a missionary to Cambodia. Marie's organization had supported her efforts for over 40 years.

Marie and her husband, Norman, first came to Cambodia in the 1950s and immediately fell in love with the beautiful Cambodian people. They swiftly learned the language and attended to the many unmet needs around them until the Khmer Rouge forced all religious organizations out in 1975. Marie and Norman then moved to France to minister to the Cambodian population in Paris.

In 1991, while they were still in France, Norman unexpectedly died at age 57. Despite her loss, Marie continued the work on her own. In 1994, the door was opened for her to return to the land and the people she cared so deeply for and re-establish her organization's efforts in Phnom Penh. Marie continued serving until 1999—when she got the “call” that would interrupt her calling. Marie was to return to her denomination's headquarters and formalize her retirement. She was incredulous as the director reiterated the organization's firm stance on retirement at age 66. The director told her the decision was his and that he had made his decision. Marie was distraught and felt despondent over the fate of the orphans, the AIDS patients and the “killing fields” widows she had left behind. Their tribulations and fates had no retirement date.

Marie returned to Canada and wondered what she would do next. Clearly, her organization was no longer in her corner. After a couple of years of imposed retirement, Marie gathered her four children and their spouses and told them, “I'm approaching 69

years of age and I can do anything I want with my life, and I have decided to return to Cambodia.” There would be no turning back this time.

Her family helped her form a foundation to support her efforts. She has been back in Cambodia for a decade now and has continued to expand the number of orphans, AIDS patients and “grannies” they take in and care for. This year, there were more than 400 orphans under her care, scores of AIDS patients and scores of widows left desolate from the killing field days.

As the children grew up, she realized they would need an education or the risk of them returning to the life they were rescued from would increase. Marie’s latest effort has been to establish two “House of Dreams,” where these orphans can get a college education that is paid for by sponsors and live in a dormitory while they study for their future. The following is an outline of the cities and efforts currently operating under Marie Ens’ leadership, at present. All of this has been accomplished in the past 10 years as Marie has migrated through her 70s. I don’t know if there is a septuagenarian “Who’s Who,” but if there is, this woman belongs in it.

Bek Chan

- Place of Rescue I (orphanage)
- Place of Rescue (AIDS centre)
- Granny Houses
- Care for babies and pregnant young women

Phnom Penh

- Home care for AIDS victims
- House of Dreams (girls/boys dormitories)

Mongkol Borey

- Place of Rescue II (House of Mercy)
- Sisophon
- House of Dreams II Pailin
- House of Rescue III (orphanage)

And as she prepares for her 80th birthday party—as if there isn’t enough to attend to—Marie is preparing to open Place of Rescue IV orphanage in Toul Krang early in 2014. We are partnering with Marie in this particular endeavor, and our organization is offering a matching grant up to \$25,000 for any gifts that come in for this project by March 30, 2014. If you are interested, drop me a line at mitch@mitchanthony.com and I’ll gladly and gratefully direct you.

Now let's get to the central point of this story. Who can say at what age our usefulness is expired? I am proposing a new AGenda for determining usefulness—one that considers vision, passion, skill sets and experience over date of birth. If you can't find a use-by date imprinted on your forehead, then no corporation or organization should have the right to tell you that your usefulness has passed.

Mark Freedman at Encore.org has been espousing this point for years. As Mark so eloquently stated, "The world may be done with us, but we are not done with the world." Amen, brother. It's time for experience to start talking back regarding the inane policies that exclude people from their purposes, their usefulness and, yes, their callings strictly on the basis of what their date of birth happens to be.

In an effort to recognize the contributions of great citizens in their 60s and beyond, Freedman's organization gives out a number of "Purpose Prizes" each year. These prizes come with a \$100,000 award toward the cause that is being led by each of these EntreMatures (my favorite new neologism) who are leading change and progress in what used to be regarded as a reclining stage of life.

Yeah, the times they are a-changin', folks, but this time around it's not the youth doing the changing. I guess it's no small irony that as Bob Dylan continues touring incessantly in his 70s we would have a sea change around maturity and its unfolding potential for good. Change is coming as the new AGenda takes hold in our society.

Do you know someone who is making a difference and flying in the face of social convention in their so-called retirement years? Drop me a line and tell me their story. We need to get these stories out. These are the new heroes in our world—the RetireMentors for the next generation proving that experience has no expiration date.

Mitch Anthony has been recognized for his pioneering work in financial life planning. His innovative tools for strengthening client relationships are available through his Advisor Insights™ at mitchanthony.com.