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The Retirement Manifesto ... August 2012

A blog in one episode...

The story so far:

A combination of forward planning by the Board at Leeds Metropolitan University and the fact that the academic year is effectively over by the end of July has enabled me to take 'retirement' some eight months early. "Excellent!" say I ("aye!").

"But what are you going to *do*?" asks Al Terego.

Well, for all those harbouring sufficient curiosity to want to know the answer, here's my 4-Point Plan for retirement.

Now read on...

1. Make it Count

After all – what use is a retirement if you can't indulge in life's pleasures? Top of the list, the resolution is to see friends more often. There are many people whose company and conversation is a delight, and they've been neglected; especially during long periods of marking students' research dissertations, etc. (And I'm not sure that marking ever stopped over the past year.) It's time to jump into the Bugatti Veyron and go see them. (Can anyone lend me a Bugatti Veyron?)

Another resolution is to hear more live classical music. Is there anything quite like an orchestra that grabs your total attention for an hour or so? Try Schubert's 'Great C-Major' Symphony, and be transported. A subsidiary resolution is just to hear more music, across sundry genres. (It must be nice to be able to play a stringed instrument. At least I can play the hi-fi pretty well.)

2. Pass on Knowledge and Skills (worth a fee)

Have vast experience, will travel. (Devotees of extremely old American TV programmes will be relieved to note that no guns are involved. If you vaguely recall the series, you can press your nostalgia button by enjoying an earful of 'The Ballad of Paladin' by Duane Eddy.)

It struck me that – allowing for a little temporal overlap - I'm sitting on top of 33 years experience in market research, 11 years in university teaching, 3 years in human factors engineering research, 3 years in postgraduate psychology research,

2 years in psychotherapy training and delivery, and a bit of management consultancy. One can't just do *nothing* with all that. While 'retirement' seems to preclude active *selling*, I do want to offer training, coaching and mentoring, for practitioners, buyers and users of qualitative market research. I'm delighted that a well-known ad agency has already taken up the offer. If you're interested, please contact me. (Rave reviews available on request...)

And, incidentally, "will travel" is true: UK, most of Europe, certainly; North America and Australia, if generosity is on offer. I promise to charge less than the average High Street solicitor.

3. Evangelise (a little) for Better Quality Qualitative Research

For decades, I've had a bee in my proverbial bonnet (the only sort I wear). Given the near-universal wish to see high-quality qualitative research, why on earth do academic and commercial-world 'quallies' have such profound distrust of each other? Why don't market research quallies consult the collective memory, stop re-inventing the wheel, and ask themselves if their data are true and reliable? Why don't academic quallies stop obsessing about what exactly they should do, and start asking themselves "what does it all mean?" (Ooh – that's better.)

It started with a paper I wrote for the Market Research Society (MRS), back in 1987, which has recently been placed on the UK Open Resource Network: 'What Determines Quality in Qualitative Research?', downloadable from <http://bit.ly/QnEr3U> . (One *very* serious commentator at the time failed to notice the tongue-in-cheek conclusions, so I'd better admit their existence...)

There were some intervening publications on this theme, but let's fast-forward to my Market Research 'Valedictory Lecture' (2011): 'Market Segmentation, Qualitative Research and Conversations Across the Garden Wall'. You can view it at <http://bit.ly/wYwgxl> . The 'garden wall' is the one that has been built between academic and commercial world researchers.*

I really do want to tell more people about this, and suggest ways to aim higher, and better. If you'd like a guest lecture, let me know. I'll probably do it for expenses only.

There's one more 'public' lecture that needs to be aired. Of late, I've begun to feel that I really should answer that original 1987 question – at least partially. As soon as I find a suitable forum, I'll deliver it. The provisional title is 'Towards a Formula for Quality in Qualitative Research'.

4. Be Charitable (waive the fee: make it free)

Geoffrey Roughton attended the first-ever MRS Conference in 1957 as a Client Exec for Television Audience Measurement. As he has now reached such seniority that he would be well entitled to contemplate the research world while sitting cross-legged on a mountain top, I'm awfully impressed that he has recently, with MRS support, launched 'Research Aid': an initiative to bring market research advice to small charities, which would find it impossible to commission their own, full-price ad hoc

research work. I've put my name down on his 'experts roster'. There are so many people doing good works in charities that Research Aid seems to be a very worthwhile initiative in social responsibility. Geoffrey calls it *pro bono*, which shows the value of a classical education; but as I've never much liked U2, let's say it's available for expenses only.

And finally... I plan to continue with a 'labour of love' of my own: the Oral History of Market Research project. The idea is to create an audio resource that would be of interest to Market Researchers in years to come, via interviews with some of the luminaries of the industry. The interviewing task seemed tailor-made for a psychologist-quallie, and I'm delighted to have the enthusiastic support of The Research Network, the club for senior market researchers. I've done nine interviews so far, with people who were there in the early days of market research, and they've all been fascinating.

Afterword:

Al Terego: So how long is this manifesto good for? You're not in a five-year parliament, you know.

Lawrence: At least a year. Three years max.

Al Terego: Don't call me Max...

* Readers of an academic bent will insist that I provide proper references...

Bailey, L.F. (1987) What Determines Quality in Qualitative Research? The Market Research Society Newsletter, Oct.1987, pp.44-45.

LeedsMetUni (2011) Lawrence Bailey -- Market Research Valedictory Lecture [video online] Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdQREwSRu7g> [Accessed {date}]