

RETIREMENT – THE END OR A NEW START?



One of the major changes in life is retiring. It is a change that many look forward to, without too much consideration. When I turned 50, working as a Watch Supervisor at a Swedish ATC centre, I simply looked forward to it and was pleased to know it was coming in only ten years. In Sweden, retirement age is otherwise typically 65 and I believe most controllers will go earlier than you would with another profession.

However, just a few days after that 50th birthday something happened that would change my view. I got the opportunity to work for ICAO in Namibia. It was to last for just over four years and I brought my family with me, with two daughters in a Namibia school. The job was professionally challenging and life in Namibia was a fantastic adventure for the family.


Back home again, with only five years to go, my views had changed. I realised that work can offer so much to life, and I felt that I had more than those five years to give as a professional. In Namibia, I had been involved in SMS, drafting handbooks and taking part in the training of inspectors. I investigated a lot of safety incidents and started

thinking about what factors really made these things happen. Safety was of course always a part of my life as a controller, but now I wanted to know more.

As I returned home, I started reading books and got a part-time job doing safety assessments, with some training at EUROCONTROL IANS in Luxemburg. I soon found that whenever I read about safety, another term was mentioned: 'human factors'. Training opportunities were there, but unfortunately my employer did not share my enthusiasm, so I needed to do this on my own time and with my own money. Is it possible to learn a new profession, on your days off and in only a few years as you are getting closer to 60? It would have been harder if I had chosen a completely different job, but I believe that my comprehensive background as a controller, and my international experience, will match well with my new knowledge and skills.

I have attended courses at IANS and continue to do so. I have become a member of a few HF associations and try to visit conferences as often as possible. I applied to the Coventry University for their distance learning

MSc Human Factors in Aviation. It is quite a lot of work and I do it on my free time but have managed this far. I am into my second and last year for the MSc and it is soon time to decide my thesis subject.

However, it is also great fun! I learn a lot and I meet a lot of interesting people with fascinating ideas and views. I find that this is already changing my own view on how we work at the centre. I believe I better understand both problems and success, I find areas that can be improved, and I really look forward to the years ahead. I do believe that it is possible to develop as a human and professional even as the years start ticking. 

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