

Giving Back

Warren Harrison

This issue of *IEEE Software* marks the end of my tenure as editor in chief. I'm delighted to hand the reins over to Hakan Erdogmus. It has truly been an exciting and gratifying four years. IEEE Computer Society rules wisely limit editors in chief to no more than two consecutive two-year terms to ensure a constant influx of new blood and fresh ideas. So it is, as they say, "the end of the road."



Running *IEEE Software*

During my tenure, we will have processed just under 850 submissions. With a minimum of three reviewers per submission, this works out to more than 2,500 reviews during the past four years.

The actual evaluation of most of these manuscripts is the responsibility of the magazine's associate editors in chief. Normally, after initially screening a submission, the EIC assigns it to an AEIC, who is an expert in a particular functional area of software development. The AEIC arranges for at least three reviewers to evaluate the manuscript and, based on these reviews, makes a recommendation to the EIC. Sometimes, we invite guest editors to organize a special issue; in those cases, the GEs act as AEICs. Also, some of the top names in the field write regular columns for the magazine, and they and the AEICs constitute *Software's* editorial board. Beyond the day-to-day process of obtaining material to publish, we must also establish policy, set editorial direction, and evaluate how we're doing. The *IEEE Software* Editorial Board and Advisory Board meet annually, at their own expense, to discuss these issues and advise the EIC.

As you can imagine, all this consumes a tremendous amount of time and effort from

many people. It would be reasonable to ask why so many people are willing to devote so much to this process (my family asks this question all the time). It certainly isn't the money! Other than the magazine's small professional staff responsible for getting each issue out on time, almost everyone—the EIC, board members, AEICs, GEs, reviewers, columnists, and manuscript authors—serves as an unpaid volunteer.

Being a volunteer

In my four years with *IEEE Software* (as well as my 10 or so years as EIC of *Empirical Software Engineering* and the *Software Quality Journal*), I've been amazed at the technical community's spirit of volunteerism. The community as we know it simply couldn't function without volunteers. They run not only the IEEE and the ACM but also the innumerable conferences, workshops, and unaffiliated professional publications that define our community.

I think most people volunteer because the personal and professional rewards are so great. These rewards apply equally to volunteering in your professional community as they do to volunteering in other socially beneficial activities.

The rewards

Certainly one benefit you gain when you volunteer is learning about your community. Whether it's Meals on Wheels or organizing a special issue on your favorite technical topic, getting out of your comfort zone and learning about the rest of the community, their beliefs, and their perspectives is not only valuable, it's also fascinating.

Volunteering certainly forces you to develop leadership skills. I've heard leadership defined as "an individual's ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to work toward a common goal." As you'd expect, the people you'll be working with will probably be vol-

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unteers as well. So, unlike your boss, you don't have any of the typical carrots and sticks to get people to do what you want them to do—you can't fire anyone, dole out raises, or assign offices. Basically the only way to get people on board is by exercising leadership. In my book, a year of working effectively in a responsible role with other volunteers is worth a half-dozen years of managing paid employees. As one volunteer once told me, "At work, I'll do any crazy kind of thing they ask me to do as long as they keep paying me, but when I'm volunteering my time, I've got to *want* to do it." Often a volunteer's job is to get other volunteers to want to do the work. In spite of titles and organizational charts, volunteers don't really have bosses.

Another benefit of volunteering is the change of pace that we all need once in a while. For many professionals, the workaday job sometimes becomes monotonous and repetitive. Volunteering lets you take on new challenges and exercise skills that your job doesn't utilize. It also helps you grow, both professionally and personally, as well as get a break from thinking about your "real" job. While some people use hobbies to "get away from it all," most confirmed workaholics (including me) find volunteering a more satisfying way to disengage from work stress and still meet their need for purpose.

Many, if not most, software development organizations tend to be closed environments. You interact with the same people day in and day out. Contrary to what you might think, volunteerism is as much about social interaction as it is about "doing stuff." Volunteer activities expand the circle of people you interact with. I met many of my closest friends through my volunteer activities—both technical and non-technical. In most cases, I would have never come into contact with these folks otherwise.

Clearly, a significant volunteer experience will often improve your marketability. Not only does volunteering give you a documented opportunity to develop skills you might never have a chance to try at work, but it also in-

creases your visibility and expands your professional network.

If you're enthusiastic about something, volunteering gives you an opportunity to become a change agent, whether this deals with work, your profession, or the community at large. Few things in life are more satisfying than knowing you had a hand in shaping organizational or community policies and the perspectives of others.

IEEE Computer Society opportunities

If you're interested in embarking on the volunteer journey, a good way to start is in your technical community—and the IEEE Computer Society is a great jumping-off point. Many professional organizations, including the IEEE Computer Society, work at least two levels: local and global.

For instance, the Computer Society has many local chapters, from Bangalore to Boise. For someone who hasn't volunteered before, this is a great place to start. You can learn about your technical community, exercise leadership skills, develop professional networks, and enjoy a change of pace just as easily locally as globally. In fact, many volunteers find the rewards of volunteering locally are greater than working at the national or international level. You can find a list at www.computer.org/portal/pages/ieeecscommunities/chapter/CSchapters.html. If there isn't a local chapter nearby, you and 11 other colleagues can form one by following the instructions at www.computer.org/portal/pages/ieeecscommunities/chapter/index.html.

If you'd like to have more global impact, the Society also has opportunities to volunteer for a variety of boards, committees, councils, and task forces. See www.computer.org/portal/pages/ieeecscommunities/tab/index.html for a list of what's available. Many volunteers find working with colleagues from around the world particularly rewarding.

You don't need to be a big wheel, have a PhD behind your name, or work for a major research laboratory to participate. All you need is an interest and willingness to contribute your time and energy. Your participation *will* be appreciated.

Other volunteer opportunities

Of course, you can volunteer for plenty of other worthy causes. In fact, as society becomes increasingly computerized, people who can find their way around a computer system or write software become ever more valuable as volunteers. Although donating your time is certainly rewarding, it can be even more rewarding to donate both your time and your expertise.


One of my favorite quotes is from Marian Wright Edelman: "Service is the rent we pay for living on this planet. It's the very purpose of life, not something you do in your spare time."

The end

So this is the end of the road. I look forward to great things for *IEEE Software* over the next four years under Hakan. I thank all of you readers for your support of the magazine and your letters over the past four years. I especially want to thank my family for their support and patience.


I've also had the absolute pleasure and honor to serve with many wonderful *Software* Editorial Board and Advisory Board members during my term. I thank each one of these volunteers for giving their time, effort, and expertise to the magazine. They've all made a unique contribution and made my job much easier. A few editorial board members and columnists, along with their columns, are retiring from the magazine at the end of the year. I want to thank Jane Huffman Hayes and Nancy Eickelmann, coeditors of *Quality Time*; Richard Thayer, editor of *Software Engineering Glossary*; and Karl Reed, editor of *From Your Technical Council*, for all their efforts and wish them well in the future.

IEEE Software and, indeed, all the IEEE Computer Society publications would not exist without the staff's efforts. I want to take this opportunity to thank the entire staff and acknowledge their many valuable contributions.

Please stay in touch—you can reach me at warren.harrison@computer.org. 

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