The Art of Retiring Gracefully
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As April’s showers give way to May’s flowers, many PTAs are transitioning as well. Electing new officers can bring new ideas and energy to a PTA, but part of their success depends on how the current officers handle their retirement.

If you’re in your final term of office, chances are you haven’t given much thought to what your role will be once you’ve left office. The end of the school year is busy with wrapping things up, teacher appreciation, fun days, field trips, graduation, and numerous other activities. You may be leaving your position because your child is moving on to another school, because you’ve served the maximum number of terms, or because you lost a contested election. Regardless of why you are leaving, doing so gracefully can provide a significant benefit for the PTA, the school, and the children you have worked so hard for the last few years.

As a retiring officer, your goal is to serve as a resource for those following you, to back out of the spotlight while sharing your experience when needed. Preserving that institutional knowledge of how and why things have been done in the past is crucial to the ongoing success of a PTA. Take the time now before the end of the year to have your fellow officers and committee chairmen update their procedure books (or create them, if you don’t have them). This can be as simple as asking your chairmen to fill out a sheet on what their committee was, what it did, how they spent their budget, who they contacted to support or participate in an event, and what they would do differently in the future.

Take the time to counsel your replacement. Don’t just drop the PTA tubs off and disappear; take the time to go through the materials, share what you have learned about running a meeting or working with your principal, and make sure they know how to get in touch with your district or region director as well as yourself if they have a question or problem in the coming year. Encourage them to take the PTA training courses that are available because spending a few hours doing so will save them many more hours over the course of the year.

Finally, let your successor know that you are there for them in whatever capacity they would like, that you may still be attending PTA meetings, but you know that it is their show to run this coming year. When other PTA members ask you operational questions, politely direct them to the new board for answers. Share your experience in meetings when asked, but discreetly provide a non-confrontational “heads up” message behind the scenes if you haven’t been asked.

By retiring gracefully, you will give your PTA a solid foundation for your new board to be successful. They will feel comfortable trying new ideas, knowing that you won’t undercut them by speaking against them in public or behind their backs, but will share your concerns privately with the officers. You will have provided them with the information they need to continue what has been successful in the past, and encouraged them to get the training they need to be successful going forward.