

When I'm sixty-four

*'...Send me a postcard, drop me a line,
Stating point of view
Indicate precisely what you mean to say
Yours sincerely, wasting away
Give me your answer, fill in a form
Mine for evermore
Will you still need me, will you still feed me,
When I'm sixty-four.'* The Beatles



"I was hoping for a youthful response, not a childish one."

In an idle moment recently, I was pondering the meaning of things and the nature of our existence. One day, another day and another. Then one day, there will be no more days and we'll be gone.

It set me thinking about what a day felt like when I was 18 and what a day might be like when I'm 64 – the spirit of youth which was bubbling in me then and the spirit I hope will still be alive and well, less than a decade from now.

I remember the urgency I felt then in all manner of ways, including the conviction that life was to be lived and I wanted to make my mark, to be a contender. Get involved, do something about 'it', whatever 'it' was. Make a difference (and maybe meet the girl of my dreams?).

Touching that spirit in us matters because we're all being told it's a jolly good thing to encourage more young people to become trustees – to do something about the rather startling fact that 61 percent of trustees are over 55. More trustees are over 75 than are under 34.



So here's a challenge for those trustees who are three decades either side of me at age 57: let's take courage and in all ways and as often as we can, let's listen to whatever spirit of youth we can find inside us and act accordingly.

Let's feel our fear and do it anyway; be open to fresh ways, resisting the stultifying old habits of governance which we do because that's how we did things in our day.

They constrain us and they're so familiar we

don't notice them any more, but the young people we want on our board will – and they'll walk away.

Let's see that a fresher style of governance, which we see as being good because it makes it easier for young trustees, also refreshes us. Let's embrace it. (You know the kind of thing – concise papers, a buddy for new trustees, shorter meetings with variety, relaxed dress...) The spirit of youth calls for the same, whatever age its frame.

Let's offer ourselves to a board made up of a majority of young people, know what it's like to be a minority and offer our experience, and our (in my case, gently greying) wisdom. I've just joined the board of Read International – average age of the six youngest trustees is rising 26, leaving two of us in our 50s propping up the older end. It's a board with energy, audacity and courageous self-belief.

If you can't find much spirit of youth within yourself, no worries. Maybe you have younger relatives or acquaintances. Perhaps the spirit of youth is alive for them and they'll tell you what would entice them into becoming a trustee, what would make it attractive for them. Listen, really listen and they could be a source of fresh wisdom for you.

And ponder how it was in your day and what you would love to see in all those days yet to come. ●



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This article is part of a series by Martin Farrell that looks in a light-hearted, but nevertheless serious way, at some of the more subtle issues facing trustee boards