

MANAGING BOOKS: IDEAS: DEMOGRAPHICS

Retire? But there's still work to be done

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RETIRE RETIREMENT

By Tamara Erickson

Harvard Business Press,

183 pages, \$21.95

Print Edition - Section Front



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- Go to the Report on Business section



The leading edge of the boomers has passed the age of 60: Retirement is staring them in the face. But for many, there is still so much they want to do.

They struggle with a midlife malaise, wondering whether there is time to make the difference in the world that they expected in their formative years of the 1960s to achieve. They don't feel old - or as old as they expected to feel at 60.

Consultant Tamara Erickson says they are in what she calls "middlescence," a time of liberation and exploration that will lead them to greater adventures in the same way that adolescence brought them into their first adult phase. Like adolescence, middlescence can be a time of frustration, confusion and alienation but also one of

self-discovery and new beginnings.

"Today, millions of mid-career men and women are wrestling through middlecence - looking for ways to balance job responsibilities, family and leisure, while hoping to find new meaning in their work. Boomers must redefine this middle age," she writes in *Retire Retirement*.

On their tail are two generations that are smaller in numbers and less enchanted with the ways of the workplace. They are unlikely to throw themselves into work with the same blinkered zeal as boomers. The result is probably a need for some boomers to remain in the work force in order to keep organizations properly staffed. And they probably can do that, she contends, because they are fit, with another 30 years ahead of many of them, much of it time that will be spent in reasonably good health. The middle years will differ from traditional old age.

"As many corporate leaders are beginning to wake up to the looming crisis of the shortage of skills and talent, they're also beginning to realize that there is a relatively obvious solution to any projected shortage - to tap into the longer life expectancies, to retire retirement," she says.

Ms. Erickson demolishes the argument that a rising share of older workers will hurt a business's competitiveness. In Europe, Danish retailer Netto set up three "oldie" supermarkets where at least half the staff was over 50. Absenteeism went down, and customer satisfaction went up. British hardware chain B&Q found that its "elder worker" stores in Manchester and Exmouth were 18 per cent more profitable than its regular outlets, in part a result of six times less employee turnover and 60 per cent less stealing and breakage.

In tackling what this means for you - that is, people in their 50s and 60s - personally, she advises weighing two important elements.

CAREER CURVE

The intensity and ambition we each have for work varies. You need to sort through how much time and energy you want to put into work, what kind of challenge you want to take on, what commitments you are willing to make, and what your economic need is for paid work. "Women who have deferred their career ambitions over the past several decades will do more, not less. Some of you see this as your moment (finally) to shine - a second shot at realizing your ambition. If your career has been to some degree on hold because of challenges and responsibilities you've had in other parts of your life, you may be itching with a newfound sense of energy for this new stage," she observes.

LIFE LURE

What attracts each of us to work also varies. Some folks are excited at being a part of a team, others like tackling challenging projects, while still other are after steady, upward progress. About 80 per cent of the work force hasn't been deeply engaged in their work experience or at all, she says. But if your reaching this next stage in life, you can find work that you deeply enjoy, whether it's for the accompanying social connections, the sense of legacy, the flexibility or independence, or whatever other element of work catches your fancy.

The book helps boomers to sort through their options, so they can find out how best to fulfill their career curve and life lure in the next stage of life. It also offers advice on how to renegotiate the deal at work, to make the most of middlecence.

Retire Retirement is clearly written and is a timely career guide for boomers as they consider the future.

In Addition: Anna Rowley is a psychologist whose practice is devoted to working with high-ranking Microsoft Corp. executives who are struggling, using something she calls "short-term corporate therapy," in which they

not only sit in their office and talk about their childhood but she also follows them into meetings to see how childhood and other traumas are affecting performance. In *Leadership Therapy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 243 pages, \$30.95) she explains her approach, with examples (nobody named Bill or Steve is mentioned), and also shares how to apply the concepts to be your own therapist, exploring your own beliefs, confidence, self-awareness, trust, and power and ambition. It's clear, jargon free, and helpful in providing clues to behavioural problems.

Just In: *Project Renewment* (Scribner, 243 pages, \$23.50) by therapist Bernice Bratter and aging expert Helen Dennis leads women through retirement issues to help them find emotional satisfaction, be it contemplating a sunset or helping to change the world.

Television journalist Mary Civiello, now a communications consultant, and business communications writer Arlene Matthews show how to improve your presentations in *Communication Counts* (John Wiley, 236 pages, \$23.99).

In their second edition of *A Complaint Is A Gift* (Berrett-Koehler, 287 pages, \$21.95) consultants Janelle Barlow and Claus Møller explain how to recover customer loyalty when things go wrong.

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