Auto Insurance
Compare competing quotes, quickly

Paying Too Much for Aut
in Saratoga Springs,
ZIP code where you park at night 12866

SHIFTING CAREERS

Discovering Second Acts In Sustained Working Lives

Liz Lynch

Marc Freedman has written on aging baby boomers who decide to forgo retirement for "encore careers."

By MARCI ALBOHER
Published: February 11, 2008

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL OR SAVE THIS
PRINT
SHARE

ARTICLE TOOLS SPONSORED BY
Rock 'n Roll will never die

Marc Freedman has become the voice of aging baby boomers who are eschewing retirement for what he calls “encore careers,” long periods of meaningful and sustaining work later in life. Mr. Freedman, who was one of the founders of Experience Corps, now runs Civic Ventures, an incubator of programs and ideas to redefine the second half of life. One of those programs, the Purpose Prize, gives monetary awards to entrepreneurial innovators over the age of 60 who have contributed to the social good.

After reading his book, "Encore" (PublicAffairs, 2007), I decided to chat with Mr. Freedman about the growing phenomenon of encore careers, the obstacles facing older workers, and why it is so hard to come up with language to describe this new period of work and life.

Following are excerpts from our conversation:

Q. *You have coined the term "encore career" to describe work in the second half of life that combines continued income, new meaning and a significant contribution to the greater good. When did you notice this was happening?*

A. During the time of the first Clinton administration there was a great deal of enthusiasm around programs like AmeriCorps and Teach for America. A lot of the focus was on young people, and I felt there was an undiscovered continent of idealism and experience in the older population. So, along with the late John Gardner and others, I helped to create Experience Corps, a national service program for people over 55. It was designed to be like the Peace Corps — something you do for a year or two and then move on. What we discovered is that no one ever leaves. Instead of being something you do for a year or two, it became as significant to people as the work they did before.

Q. *How big do you think this movement is?*

A. It's hard to say. The research we've done shows that there are millions of people launching second careers in areas like education, health care, the nonprofit sector and government. And they don't want to wait until they are 62 or 65 to get started. They want to do it early enough so that they have enough time to go through the inevitable ups and downs, explore different options and do something significant for a significant period of time.

Q. *You've talked to hundreds of people forging these encore careers. How hard is it to create something that provides the kind of meaning and purpose you talk about?*

A. Society is set up to make retirement happen seamlessly. But if you want to launch a significant second career in an area of social importance, you are often on your own, even though we desperately need people to move into this direction. And the media often does a disservice by making it look easy. Take those personal finance stories with photos of a couple next to their B&B or vineyard, their dream instantly realized. It gives people who have the usual ups and downs, confusions, setbacks, a sense that they are failing because in reality it takes years.

5. I L
6. Pa
7. Mi
8. Big
9. Da
10. So
Go to Co
The N
Wha
Also in
Home
Home
Home
ADVERTI
All the ne

Q. *You talk in your book about the difficulty in naming this stage of life, which happens roughly when people hit the age of 60. You mention some phrases that didn't stick: "second act," "zoomers," "seasoned citizens," and have come up with some of your own, like "the experience movement" and "practical idealists. Why is the language around this issue so thorny?*

A. There is this proliferation of oxymorons to describe this stage of life. The young old. Sixty is the new 50. Whenever opposing words like these get jammed together, it's a sure sign that something new is being born. But, in fact, it is an entirely new stage of life and of work. And it is much more difficult to come up with something new than to tinker with something that already exists. Even for Mark Penn, who wrote Microtrends and coined the phrase "soccer moms," the best he could do was "working retired."

Q. *Is there really no one left who aspires to the old-fashioned one you depict in the early chapters your book — a life of 24/7 leisure in a Sun Belt golf or tennis community?*

A. The fact is that there are very few people who can afford to be retired for 30 years. What happens is that people are having false retirements. They are retiring from what they were doing in their midlife careers because they are tired, need a break, or have deferred many priorities. Then, after a year or five, they are rested and restless and looking ahead to a period that might be 20 years in duration. So what seemed like retirement was a sabbatical or hiatus as opposed to a final destination. The original purpose of retirement still exists. It is just getting pushed back further and further to a point where people are at the same point physically as the kinds of people that went off to Sun City in the 1960s.

Q. *Are retirement communities changing to embrace this?*

A. You are starting to see retirement communities open up in areas that aren't particularly warm and sunny because even those people want to remain close to work and family. Developers are also designing plans with home offices so people can continue working.

Q. *You have expressed concern that many older people end up in what you call "bridge jobs," at places like Starbucks, Hope Depot and Wal-Mart. What's so bad about a bridge job?*

A. It's important that the retail sector is pursuing older people, and the reason they are doing that is that they recognize them as a source of talent and experience. What troubles me is that the bridge job is becoming the new default position for people moving into their 60s and 70s. I know from our research that there are millions of people looking for

something different who don't want to phase out but instead want to focus in on work that is significant beyond themselves and they are having a much more difficult time following that path. I worry that the restful golden years are going to be supplanted by the Wal-Mart decades.

Q. *You acknowledge that employers aren't helping. What would you like to see employers doing?*

A. Employers need to recognize, particularly those facing talent shortages, that there is more than one place to look when filling these gaps. While many young people have an enormous amount to offer, there is another vast and growing pool of talent and commitment. And employers need to correct some misconceptions. They often assume that people in their 50s and 60s have one foot out the door. But an accumulation of evidence supports the fact that turnover is less with this population than with young people. So it is worth investing in these individuals.

Q. *You make a lot of policy suggestions including revamping higher education, creating programs to train older workers, allowing people to buy into Medicare, giving workers earlier access to tax-advantaged savings and pensions, and my favorite — the national sabbatical. Do you think we can hope to see some of these policy changes in a next administration?*

A. The answer is dispiriting. It's hard enough to get the candidates to talk about the hot-button issues of Social Security and Medicare. But no one is talking about these issues even though many of them are themselves nearing this juncture. There is no creative policy debate around these issues. No recent candidate has embraced them. And with 10,000 boomers turning 60 every day, it's about time.

More Articles in Job Market »

Need to know more? 50% off home delivery of The Times.

Ads by Google what's this?

Bank of America® - IRA
Your Retirement. Your IRA. Make the most of it. Open Today.
www.BankofAmerica.com/IRA

Retirement Age
Retirement Age listings Find It Here Now.
Retirement.OutrageousSales.com