

Boomers can still be relevant in the workplace

By Steve Kayser

Boomers may want to recall one of the poets they grew up reading, Dylan Thomas, and his most famous poem, named for its first line, “Do not go gentle into that good night,” a desperate appeal to resist the trappings of old age.

As they retire, baby boomers need to stay true to their reputation for grand statements, and to mobilize their skill set in the business world.

In fact, many older Americans may have little choice but to adapt their mindset and survive longer in their careers if they want to maintain something resembling their current lifestyle during retirement.

Here are a few trends that may incentivize aging workers to clock in for a few more years:

- The number of Americans 55 and older will almost double between now and 2030 – from 60 million today to 107.6 million, according to the Census Bureau. That will likely strain public safety nets such as Social Security and Medicare.
- American life expectancy is at an all-time high, and death rates are at an all-time low, which means some people will outlive their retirement savings.
- The global economic crisis has wiped out or severely affected millions of middle- and senior-aged people’s life savings.

But with an increasingly competitive pool of professionals whose skill sets need to be regularly updated, how can boomers stay in the game?

Alvin Toffler said, "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."

Older workers can maintain their value – by staying "R-E-L-E-V-A-N-T."

- What it means to learn, unlearn and relearn. The ever-shifting sands of technology pose a special challenge to older workers. Younger professionals not only grew up working and entertaining themselves with screens, they also learned to adapt to technological leaps. A program you learn today may not be relevant in a few years, so keep an open and flexible mind.

- Being R-E-L-E-V-A-N-T: Take this mnemonic device to heart: Risk, Experiment, Listen and Learn, Engage, Value, Attitude of gratitude, No to negativity, and Time. This is an ongoing, evolving note to keep in your mind no matter your professional situation. I've been around a lot of charismatic and effervescent folks in their 70s and 80s who are still successful and growing, both on a personal and business level. The acronym encompasses the ideas that seem to promote a proactive life.

- Answer the question, "What resonates with you?" This is a deceptively deep question when you apply it to your life's trajectory. If life hasn't turned out to be what you expected it would 30 years ago, then it's time to recalibrate how you see yourself, especially if that's as a perpetual pre-retiree. If you're not sure of how you see yourself in today's setting, start with what the spiritual writer Joseph Campbell called the "moving power of your life," which can be sensed by the things that resonate within you. The things that resonate within you, such as an unusual book, may just be the compass you need to find your way.

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