

Work Daze: Retire-me-not

by *Bob_Goldman*

Ever wonder what you'll be doing at 65? If your boss has anything to say about it, you may not be watching the waves of wheelchairs roll by at Casa Siesta. According to the experts, the latest trend in retirement is to "just say no."

Bob Goldman has been an advertising executive at a Fortune 500 company in the San Francisco Bay area. It's true! As the first baby boomers hit retirement age, a strange new phenomenon is being observed - the rebellious flower children who came of age at Woodstock are now refusing to leave their button-downs unbuttoned. They're choosing work over play, and what is even more remarkable - their companies are glad to have them.

The obvious reason the boomers are not retiring is, well, obvious. They can't afford it. Having grown up with a passion for expensive German sports cars and high-flying Internet stocks, the boomers now find themselves facing their sunset years with barely enough to finance a refrigerator box by the freeway. The fact that their homes may be losing value, as well, make it even more difficult for many pre-retirees to cash out and goof off. Even their luxuriously remodeled kitchens with their combination crock-pot whirlpool spa and built-in wheat grass blenders are becoming more of a liability than an asset.

But there's another reason why the traditional retirement scenario is undergoing a rewrite. According to a recent article in BusinessWeek online, employers are facing a "shortage of workers with specific skills and talent as 77 million baby boomers reach retirement age and the number of seasoned professionals to replace them fall short."

This shortfall is good news to workers of any age. If you're just entering the job market, employers will snatch you up simply to have a warm body in a chair when the senior partners start decomposing. (If you've felt that certain departments are unresponsive, like human resources and information technology, it may not be because they don't care. They may simply all be mummified.)

If you're an employee whose been around so long they can count the rings on your beer belly, the good news is the end of the "the cult of the young." Instead, the big bucks will now be going to the old bucks.

Experience is the name of the hiring game these days, and it doesn't matter whether you went to the Harvard School of Business or Herbert's Academy of Taxidermy. If your resume is longer than your arm, some employer will pay you an arm and a leg.

Unfortunately, not every profession is anxious to recruit and retain gray-hairs. Your opportunity to get a running back position with the Chicago Bears has probably not improved significantly since your last birthday, not even considering that you've been spiking your Metamucil with steroids. Nor has age improved your chances of dancing on stage with Justin Timberlake, though it is possible that if you continue to practice your accordion you could secure a gig with the Polka Party Rascals.

According to BusinessWeek, the five professions most in need of the senile and the restless are government, financial services, education, health care and science. Personally, I'm not sure that our government would benefit by having any more experienced hands on the tiller. At this point, I believe the only chance for improving the situation in Washington, D.C., is to have the government taken over by chimpanzees. They couldn't do any worse, and they would certainly be more fun to watch.

In the science arena, the article cites a 58-year-old molecular biologist who retired from her full-time job and immediately started doing contract work from her home. This may be an excellent arrangement for scientists, but I would feel a little uncomfortable if I learned that my neighbor was experimenting with DNA in her kitchen, or cracking atoms in the garage. If your neighbor stops by to borrow a cup of plutonium and a centrifuge, it's time to move.

As far as the other professions go, I really don't see much harm in letting a bunch of old codgers take over our banks, schools and hospitals. Hospitals would certainly be better off if everyone were on Medicare, not just the patients. If you're shelling out \$150,000 for a toenail transplant, you don't need the battle over who owes the co-pay.

And of course, don't forget business humor columnists who just get better and better the older they become. I've been writing this column since I was 87, kiddo, and you'll have to admit, I'm finally getting really, really close to doing this job right.

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