

Boomers Change Retirement
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“Leap and the net will appear” – a Zen saying

Some baby boomers are easing out of the plum jobs that they have monopolized, others are catapulting out of those jobs. Although the official retirement age is 62 years old, many boomers are leaving the workplace in their 50's. Just as the baby boomers have influenced every other age group they have moved through, they are about to reinvent what it means to be old. Boomers are also reinventing retirement. And why shouldn't they? Boomers will spend almost thirty years in retirement; therefore, retirement becomes one of the longest stages of life. “Working in retirement, once considered an oxymoron, is the new reality”, according to a report by The Conference Board. The report continues, “Boomers also indicate that the historical linear life plan – where certain years are earmarked to education, work, and then leisure – is becoming obsolete. Boomers want to work on terms that are customized to their own needs. The goal is to “ratchet back” and give up responsibility, yet stay involved and active in business. Lifelong learning plays a vital role in these new work goals.

A recent Merrill Lynch survey found that 77 percent of more than 3,400 baby boomers polled planned to work in some capacity in their retirement, with second careers in the mix for some, including 13 percent who intended to start their own business. Many of these boomers want to make dramatic changes. Some of these boomers may find their “life's purpose” at this stage.

The impact on the workforce of the boomer departure is huge.

- Every day 10,000 Baby Boomers turn 55 years old
- One in six workers will be over age 55 this year, 2006
- For every two experienced workers leaving the workforce, one will enter

This article is about how and why boomers make that LEAP from one career to another – late in life.

Mary Ann Wolcott, a Realtor with JME Realty in Destin, spent the first twenty years of her professional career as a school speech pathologist. When she was in high school her goal was to be a veterinarian, but an early marriage and children made that

goal impossible. As an older than average student at Murray State, Mary Ann got her Bachelors Degree in Speech Pathology. She received her Masters Degree in Education Leadership from the University of West Florida.

Real estate interested Mary Ann for a long time, and the final straw for her “leap” was a transfer in school assignment. Mary Ann eased into her career change. She took a yearlong leave of absence before making the final leap.

Continuing education was a big role in her leap. She took the required real estate class and passed the licensure test.

Four years into her new career, Mary Ann says, “the greatest thing about changing careers was the whole new learning curve”. She also loves the flexibility. The worst part of changing careers is “the unknown”.

Mary Ann’s advice for those boomers considering a career change, “Research your interests, interview people in the field you are considering and go for it! Do not accept status quo.”

Mike Paris, the owner of Kellyco Flowers and Gifts, had many interests as a high school student and graduated from Kansas State with a degree in math. Mike spent the first twenty years of his career with the Lewis Bear Company in their wholesale grocery division. Downsized out of a position, Mike left Pensacola for a short stint in North Carolina. Fortunately, according to Mike, he left his family here because he was back nine months later. After several months of unemployment, he began contemplating a business of his own. Seven days after his 53rd birthday, Mike became an entrepreneur; he and his wife became the owners of Kellyco Flowers and Gifts.

The best thing about changing careers for Mike is “it recharges your batteries. You are afraid and exhilarated at the same time”. Mike says” I have loved every minute of it” The worst thing about becoming an entrepreneur – “going in debt for the business”.

Mike’s advice – do not sell your self short.

Desley Parker, a Success Coach in Crestview retired as an officer from the Navy. In high school, Desley’s dream was to be a doctor. Coaching is actually Desley’s third career, after the Navy, she devoted five years to raising her children. As her children grew up, she began to wonder, “What do I do now?” After hearing a Coach speak at a

professional meeting, Desley contacted her and began her journey toward her certification as a Success Coach.

Like others, Desley loves the flexibility of being a business owner. She is living her life purpose and helping others learn how to do the same. Her least favorite part of business ownership is the marketing of the business.

When considering a career change, Desley encourages people “to identify their values and to take responsibility for their life”.

Jay Lunt, the owner of Folkers Window Company, graduated college with a business law degree. Power Generation was his first career and next he worked in a startup company in Oklahoma City.

Jay has a vacation place in Lillian, Alabama. Exhibiting the boomer trait of taking risks, Jay and his wife decided to move to the Gulf coast – and then find a business to own. They were ready for a life style change where they can enjoy every day.

Research of businesses was Jay’s “continuing education”. Bill Gibson, of Gibson and Associates, Inc. was his instructor.

The best thing about changing careers as a “fifty something boomer” is greater personal satisfaction according to Jay. “Owning your own business allows you to take away the corporate environment. A small company is anti-corporate culture”. The worst thing about starting his business was coming to a place with three hurricanes. His business flourishes while his house is still a wreck.

Jay wishes that he had made his move ten years earlier and that he had been a little bolder. He was in a comfort zone and accepted mediocrity as the norm.

Popular music reflects the culture. The old songs “Take this Job and Shove It” by Johnny Paycheck and “The Gambler” (Know When to Hold Them, Know When to Fold Them, Know When to Walk Away.....) by Kenny Rogers (both artists boomers themselves) reflects the boomer philosophy of career change. Boomers are living the Zen saying “Leap and the net will appear” as it pertains to late in life career change. Additionally, in true boomer fashion, we embrace Basil King’s statement “Be Bold and Mighty Forces will come to your Aid”.

