

Retirement or Encore?

by Ron Crossland

Baby Boomers. Workforce vacuum. Next generation leaders. Talent wars. Immigration. Outsourcing.

There's a lot of debate and argument about what the workforce will look like by 2010, 2015, and



beyond as boomers around the globe slide into retirement and leave all the future earnings of their companies (and the growth of their 401(k) investments) in the hands of the capable – or not so capable, but far smaller group of younger workers. Authors like Dychtwald, Erickson, and Morison (Workforce Crisis), editors Beatty and Visser's contribution (Thriving on an Aging Workforce), Niejahr's thoughts about Germany (Altenrepublik – Republik of the Old), and O'Hara-Devereaux's views on China among other things (Navigating the Badlands) have created waves of thought concerning the demographics of our age.

We've created a collective sensation of what the Maori call puangi (stomach sinking, like when a boat surges, or an airplane drops suddenly, or the first plunge of a rollercoaster) about this coming workforce vacuum. (BTW – I got "puangi" from one of the best book gifts I've ever received, The Meaning of Tingo and Other Extraordinary Words from Around the World, by Adam Jacot de Boinod.)

What are we going to do? Well, frankly, I tend to agree with Dychtwald, et.al, concerning their ideas that baby boomers are not going to stop working. They are just going to start changing the nature of how they view work, just like the younger generation is entering and engaging in the workforce with an altered view. O'Hara-Devereaux likes to think of the current age as the "Badlands" (meaning we are in-between the good old days and the glory days to come – seems like a theme I've been living my entire work life). She argues from a tanker sized collection of evidence that this age of confusion will work itself out over the next decade or so. I heard her speak at the HRPS annual meeting in Tucson recently, and I was impressed by her command of data and puzzled by some of her conclusions. Must mean I'm part of that Republik of the Old.

But all this confab about what to do and how it will get done stimulated my mind to consider the following question: Am I going to retire before I do an encore? I mean, are you ready to just end your contribution to work, to the world, to your offspring, to society at large by engaging in some 30-year long recess? (Everyone keeps saying boomers are going to live well into their 80s, 90s, and 100s – pick your pundit for the details.)

Encore means "an additional performance in response to audience demand." It means performing one final act or series of acts that let those who have admired your work see that your work is worth admiring. It's often thought of as a command performance. Some artists (aren't you one?) simply repeat one of their favorites – others perform something that was not in the original set. I really prefer the French saying (doesn't this language just have the best phrases for everything) "de l'audace, encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace," which means "audacity, more audacity, and ever more audacity." An encore of audacity.

That's where I believe a number of us Boomers are going. We are going to boom once again in our third adulthood (right after our second midlife crisis). We are going to work more casually, work in a different industry, work for different purposes, but work we will. Yeah, some of it will be driven by the fact that we can't stop just yet because we are anxious about money. And yeah, some of it will be driven by the fact that our spouses will not be able to tolerate our company 100% of the time. And yeah, it will be driven by the fact that recess is fun, only for a while.

But I believe it will be driven mostly by the fact that we aren't finished making a contribution – that there's an encore in all of us. And boomers, today all the world is your stage, so my advice – "de l'audace, encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace."

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