

The baby boom echoes again

As the available work force shrinks, some older workers are opting to turn over a new leaf and stay on the job

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Dave Morgan is happy to be doing his bit to bolster Canada's work force by launching a new career at a time when others around him are deciding to retire.

He's bucking a trend that Statistics Canada made official this week: The vast baby boom generation is starting to leave the work force. The Statscan projection is that in less than 10 years, the number of young people getting into the labour force will no longer be numerous enough to replace retirees. That could slow economic growth as employers face a dearth of workers.

"You could think of starting a new career rather than retiring as my patriotic duty. But I did it for me," says Mr. Morgan, 61, who left a 25-year career as manager in various Canadian divisions of Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. and became a licensed commercial real estate broker in Toronto.

"I've watched a number of colleagues retire and just put their feet up. And almost universally it was not a good idea. It was bad for their health both emotionally and physically if they didn't have a plan for doing something after retiring," Mr. Morgan says.

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In his new role, Mr. Morgan sees people in their 70s who are still going strong at work every day and he figures there is no reason he can't be like them. Statscan's figures bear this out. The life expectancy of Canadians is on a steady rise and now stands at an average of 82.5 years for women and 77.7 years for men.

And this alone should make those who are thinking of retiring stop and reconsider, career experts advise.

"If you are fiftysomething and you can expect to live into your 80s, you should be thinking of this as half-time and not the beginning of the end," says Tim Cork, president of Toronto-based career transition company NexCareer Inc. and author of the advice book *Tapping the Iceberg*.

In the process, it is a perfect opportunity to create a new career that meshes with your needs and interests, he recommends. "It's not just jump back into the work force doing what you've done before, but do a basic rethink of what your next move should be and where the opportunities will be in a changing work force."

That's important because the demographic changes coming in Canada are going to make employers change their staffing strategies, says Chris Higgins, a professor at the University of Western Ontario's Ivey School of Business.

"Organizations are going to have to look at opportunities to do more with fewer people. They will replace jobs with technology and look to outsourcing jobs to counteract a labour shortage."

But Canadian employers will continue to have an insatiable need for knowledgeable employees, Prof Higgins predicts. "Employers are going to have to be more creative to attract the best talent and keep people in a more competitive work force."

But opportunities for career advancement will not open by themselves; it is always up to individuals to plan a career course, he advises. "No matter how tight the labour market, talent is still going to rise to the top and mediocrity is going to stay at the bottom."

So, the trick will be to keep your talents in demand, "The message is: Get as much knowledge as you can and have a specialty that employers will be interested in promoting," says Liz Wright, compensation practice leader for Watson Wyatt in Toronto.

That shows up in a poll Watson Wyatt did of 100 companies in Canada, asking whether they are having trouble hiring the employees they need. Just 32 per cent said they are having trouble recruiting employees in general, but 68 per cent said they are having difficulty attracting those with the "critical skills" and experience they need to help the company compete effectively, she says.

"So knowledge is power more than ever," Ms. Wright says. "There will be plenty of opportunities for people with state-of-the-art knowledge that companies will need to handle the challenges they are facing."

Foremost among the skills in demand in an increasingly global economy will be the ability to apply technology to solve problems, Mr. Cork says.

"Collaboration and communication are increasingly going to be done through technology rather than face to face," he says. He recommends that older workers ensure that they have skills in communicating effectively and persuasively through such media as conference calling and text messaging. "And whatever is coming along, you need to know about it to stay in the loop."

However, the goal shouldn't be just to work for the sake of working. "It's not about working to survive but to thrive in the second half of your life and career," Mr. Cork says. "Ask yourself: What are you passionate about? What do you love doing? You should be doing something you really love."

And that's what Mr. Morgan did. "I've always believed that I have to keep re-inventing myself," he says. "I consciously took some time to sit down and think about my life and goals."

His career at Goodyear included stints as manager in corporate planning, marketing research and government relations. One thing stood out: He particularly enjoyed his work managing the company's real estate department.

At 59 and with the comfort of a locked-in pension, he decided it was time to start building his new career, "so I can

get it developed while I am still fully active and young enough to enjoy it." He took courses and got a licence as a commercial real estate specialist and is building his business working on commissions.

But the process of re-invention he went through isn't limited to people on the cusp of retirement, Mr. Morgan says. "At any point in your career you always have to ask regularly: Do I want to recommit or do I want to walk and try something else?"

"The challenges facing the work force in the future will just create more opportunity than ever to find a career that is more satisfying."

Must be a new phase

Thinking about retirement? It's time to take inventory because there is a new career ahead of you. Here are tips from Tim Cork, president of NexCareer:

Focus on your strengths. Write down what you do well and your successes and look at potential careers that require them.

Find your passion. Make a list of the things you love to do. Spend time thinking how you can incorporate them in a new career.

Network. Find people who have succeeded and get their advice and support.

Create your brand. Do an inventory of your skills and experience to define what value you represent to an employer.

Do your homework. Research markets and industries that are of interest and correspond to your skills set - in terms of where you are now and where you want to be.

Take action. All your planning won't do you any good unless you test them in the real world.

Don't get discouraged. Remember fear, rejection and even failure can be prerequisites for success.

Have a support system. A mentor, partner, coach or trusted friends you can discuss your ideas and strategies are essential sources of encouragement and inspiration.

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