



MANY BABY BOOMERS WHO SPENT THE '60s DROPPING OUT AND TURNING ON MAY SPEND MUCH OF THEIR OWN 60s WORKING, JUST TO PAY THE BILLS. SO WHO NEEDED RETIREMENT, ANYWAY?

WORKING OVERTIME

• By Fred Kilbourne

AN ODYSSEY

IT WAS BUT ONE OF MANY DECISIONS MY MOTHER HAD TO MAKE on her own. My father was absent, not to avoid responsibility but to accept it—defeating the National Socialists in Europe. She had to decide whether her 10-year-old son was serious about wanting a snow shovel for his birthday.

I was, she made the right decision, and that shovel and I went to work. Mother Nature cooperated by dumping snow, lots of it, over and over again that winter and the next, on all our neighbors' driveways. And so I worked my way to economic freedom. Not complete freedom (which I've never found, in the economic realm nor any other) but the biggest economic-freedom jump of my life, relatively speaking. And I liked it a lot. And I suppose my neighbors in Yonkers, N.Y., liked having clear driveways, too.

You may not recently have heard such a paean to work, but get used to it, for they're going to escalate to a crescendo over the years ahead. The powers-that-be (the media, government, universities, your boss, your neighbor, and your kids) are in the process of deciding that more workers are needed, and that the first thing we (they) must do is persuade ourselves (you) to get rid of the remnants of the anti-work culture of the baby boomers.

They'll probably succeed only too well in this, leading to such excesses as the takeover of Club Med by Manpower, Ayn Rand novels as required reading at Harvard, and a smash hit entitled "Take This Job and Love It." Their primary target will be those incipient old-timers (i.e., baby boomers) who, but for a newfound love of work, might otherwise become (gasp!) retirees, thereby dooming us all (them).

They've even written a book about putting senior citizens to work, entitled *Working Through Demographic Change*, and subtitled *How Older Americans Can Sustain the Nation's Prosperity*. The authors of this anthology (14 of them, reflecting all the powers-that-be institutions above except for your kids) use daunting data from surveys and censuses as fuel for their powers of persuasion, leading the reader inexorably to the conclusion that retirement is a plague to be avoided, or at least deferred.

Working Gramps and Grannies

I've had jobs that I thoroughly enjoyed, and I've generally enjoyed (there have been brief exceptions) all the many jobs I've had over the decades. The job I enjoyed most at the time was probably that of long-haul poultry trucker in the Mojave Desert.



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That job contributed greatly to my economic freedom; I was paid in cash, and the only times I went to the bank that year were to make deposits.

It was a part-time job, accommodating the classes and labs of a full-time student, and required just a couple of days and nights per week. It took me to exotic places (I was from New England) with a lavish expense allowance (all I could eat at any truck stop) and with an impressive benefit program (the truck owner installed a powerful radio so I could be entertained while driving). It even helped to hone my entrepreneurial skills (I sometimes hired friends to come along as subcontractors) and enhanced my social life (the owner never specifically told me I couldn't date coeds while hauling chickens to their death).

What a job! It's no wonder, with jobs like this out there, that William Zinke, editor of *Working Through Demographic Change* and one of the 14 contributors, reports that there are six million retired Americans who are ready, willing, and able to work—given the chance.

Sen. John Breaux (D-La.), another of the authors, reports that many retired people want to work, are capable of continued work, and find that work enhances the quality of their lives

by keeping them mentally and physically active as well as socially connected.

Dr. Diane Piktialis, another contributor, reports on a survey by AARP (which, by the way, is now just a bunch of letters, and no longer the American Association of *Retired Persons*) that found that over three-fourths of baby boomers plan to keep working after reaching retirement age, and that more than two-thirds of those say they like work.

Not content to rely on getting us Gramps and Grannies to work by convincing us that we love our jobs, the authors of *Working* go on to tell us that work is good for us, and that we'll lead healthier and longer lives if we'll just put off retirement until it's too late.

Oh, and by the way, about those longer lives—will our assets hold out if we beat the actuarial tables? I know this potential longevity problem has caught my attention as I periodically try to chart my financial future. I've already outlived the average age at death of my parents, but my father nearly reached age 90, and did so without the help of blood pressure- and cholesterol-lowering drugs that hold the promise, or threat, of keeping me here long beyond my time.



NOT ALL JOBS ARE SUITABLE FOR BLUE-HAIRED MAMAS

Assets loom small when the horizon is distant and a conservative yield assumption is depleted by rapacious taxation and persistent inflation. Dr. Piktialis expresses concern about those who haven't accumulated enough savings to live well in retirement, to be able to afford unexpected medical care, or to pay for a grandchild's college education.

All this and more for a young oldster whose youngest daughter, April, turns 10 on the very day this article is due, which also happens to be Tax Day! It's interesting to note that like Congress debating the budget, there's no talk here of curbing profligate spending. So the solution is to work on, at least until the horizon moves into the neighborhood.

From Martial to Marital

Government is one of the powers-that-be, of course, so it's no surprise that Congress and the president last year agreed that I and others in my age group should be given the opportunity to continue working, and paying taxes, without forfeiting our Social Security benefits. The Senior Citizens Freedom to Work Act (I'm not making this up!) became effective three days after my 65th birthday, permitting me (and April) to receive Social Security benefits without breaking stride on the job or at school.

How can the government (you) afford to give us young seniors such benefits? The answer is that there are so few of us, as can be seen by comparing the number of U.S. births (in millions) at various years over the past century:

1915	3.0
1935	2.4
1955	4.1
1975	3.1
1995	3.9

Which leads us to the underlying cause of the Freedom to Work Act last year, the amendment to the Age Discrimination Act that abolished mandatory retirement in 1978, the Mandatory Get-a-Job Act of 2020, and the book on *Working* that we're reviewing.

That cause is people born in 1955 plus or minus nine years, otherwise known as the baby boomers. A warm welcome home for the victorious veterans of World War II was to be expected, even encouraged, but the total conversion of energy from martial to marital went beyond the bounds of traditional good taste, and was demographically unseemly.

Piktialis points out that the oldest of the resulting bumper crop of some 80 million erstwhile babies will this year reach the youngest age of early retirement, and that there aren't enough new workers to replace that mob as they leave the workforce over the decades ahead.

Alan Reynolds, another contributor, illustrates the problem with Census Bureau projections that show, for the quarter century ending in 2020, the population of those over 65 growing by 60 percent as opposed to only 4 percent growth in the population entering the workforce during that period. This is due

not only to all those boomers but also to medical advances that have already deferred so many deaths that, asserts contributor and medical Dr. Robert Butler, half of all human beings who have ever reached age 65 are now living.

But can they work? Only about one senior citizen (age 65 and up) in nine now works, according to contributor Dr. Sara Rix, but one in four worked in 1950 and, during World War II, one in two senior men was working in 1944.

What Age Discrimination?

Not all of the elderly can work, it's true, and not all jobs are suitable for blue-haired mamas and big-eared papas. Those doing heavy manual labor (e.g., professional football players) may have to seek other employment as they age, or even (shudder) retire. Some intellectual vocations (e.g., theoretical physics) seem to require a youthful mind for peak performance.

But most jobs are suitable for their job holders well beyond customary retirement ages. Furthermore, old age itself is better described as a condition than as a fixed chronological event. Pollster Humphrey Taylor, another of the authors, reports that 73 percent of "today's Americans" define old age in terms of a decline in physical or mental ability, and only 14 percent define it in terms of reaching a specific age. Turning age 60 may be a bit of a shocker, but it's unlikely to turn a commercial airline pilot from fit to unfit overnight.

And yet, mandatory retirement ages persist, as does age discrimination in general. Consider, for example, the deplorable use of pejoratives throughout this article when referring to those in their golden years. Piktialis similarly deplores "the cultural stereotype of older people as less energetic, less able and willing to learn, more stubborn and set in their ways, uncomfortable around the younger generation, and resentful of being supervised by younger managers." Whew!

On the other hand, Zinke reports that older workers compare favorably with younger workers (among those in a position to know) in all areas except technological expertise and health care costs. He goes on to express astonishment at "the chasm that exists between the overwhelmingly favorable views of older workers and the limited action American companies have taken to utilize this important talent pool."

And so, perhaps, age discrimination can be overcome by giving older workers a chance. I can see the possibilities here from my own experience, albeit at the opposite end of the work spectrum. The most people I've managed was not in my 30s when I started a casualty actuarial operation for an actuarial consulting firm; nor in my 40s, when I started an actuarial division for a management consulting firm; nor in my 50s when I started an insurance actuarial unit for a benefits consulting firm. It was rather in my teens and 20s, when I managed a retail and wholesale laundry in my hometown.

I recall no age discrimination, beyond good-natured kidding, probably due in part to the fact that I worked hard to master all the tasks in my job description (prepare the payroll, handle customer complaints, iron shirts, deal with personnel matters, clean the boiler, etc.) and in even larger part because I had full support from the owner. It will be essential that employers be enlisted as enthusiastic supporters of the campaign to put older Americans to work.

Affirmative Action for Geezers

As editor of *Working*, Zinke exercises his prerogative to pull things together with a concluding chapter, "A Call to Action," and particularly with the chapter's concluding section, entitled "A Call to Action." Therein he calls for "action by the private sector," "action by the public sector," "action by older Americans," and indeed for "action by all Americans."

Rather a lot of action, which could well produce a lot of results. With careful planning and a lot of luck, perhaps the beneficial results will exceed those that are perverse.

But consider Social Security, which arguably has done so well in stamping out poverty among seniors as to create a privileged class of victims who are better off by far than those (you) who are forced to subsidize them (us).

Nor is the subsidy limited to public programs. Why must my wife, a boomer, pay more to see the same movie than the subsidized ticket price charged to her daughter and husband?

For better or worse, however, Zinke's 22-point call for action includes the following highlights (*parenthetical perversity concerns are mine*):

- Restructure benefit plans to encourage older workers to remain in or return to the workforce. (*Without diminishing benefits for younger workers?*)
- Offer second-career training and flexible working arrangements to those otherwise considering retirement. (*But not to younger workers?*)
- Organize a Senior Service Corps and other government programs to promote the cause. (*To be paid for by whom?*)
- Require managers to stamp out age discrimination in the workplace, and discipline those who fail. (*Affirmative action for geezers?*)
- Respect and appreciate older Americans, and otherwise support the action plan. (*And take steps to silence skeptics and cynics?*)

So I'm of two minds about working through demographic change as put forth in *Working Through Demographic Change*. On the one hand, I generally enjoy working and intend to continue doing so indefinitely until clients or other circumstances dictate otherwise. On the other hand, long years on this planet have shown me that concerted efforts to mold public opinion usually yield perverse results, especially when those efforts are by the man with a gun (i.e., the law).

But, wait! Fresh on my desk is a single sheet of green paper that surely will render me a proselyte, if not an evangelist. My own actuarial profession, in a blatant effort to become a power-that-be, is conducting a seminar on the *Changing Patterns of Re-*

tirement. The promotional material on the green sheet tells it all (parenthetical comments are interpretive): Ongoing demographic shifts, as well as economic trends (as well as we powers-that-be), are forcing changes to the way people think about retirement.

Many people are (when they see the light, will be) postponing retirement, phasing out of their current positions, or moving to part-time employment (now that doesn't sound so bad. . .).

The seminar even introduces (to me, anyway) the DROP (Deferred Retirement Option Program), which provides those who defer retirement with a large lump sum at a later date. But how much later, the horizon? Surely this isn't the first time that a salesman, with an eye on company premiums and resultant commissions, has attempted the conversion of a Retirement Income at 65 Policy into a Whole Life Policy.

As a new convert, interested in the success of the venture, I'd suggest a different acronym, lest the wary prospect realize that DROP is only half a term, and that there's a missing word that isn't being discussed. ●

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