

# HELPING BOOMERS GIVE THEIR BEST

As millions of people in their 50s and 60s exit the corporate world, many will search for “encore careers” in the public and nonprofit sectors. This could result in the biggest transformation in the U.S. workforce since women began pouring into it some 30 years ago, says Mark Freedman, author of *Encore: Finding Work That Matters in the Second Half of Life* (PublicAffairs, \$24.95). | Freedman, founder of San Francisco think tank Civic Ventures, discussed the trend with *BusinessWeek* contributor Toddi Gutner.

## How do you define an encore career?

It's when someone can earn income, find new meaning, and use accumulated experience in ways that have a positive impact on society. At the same time, encore careers fill a set of talent shortages that threaten to compromise our education and health-care systems. They represent the best use of the accumulated experience of the baby-boomer population.

## Why do you use the term only in the context of give-back jobs?

We know from surveys that a significant percentage of boomers is already thinking about working in an area of the social sector. Our challenge is to take all of those people and get them jobs.

## Despite boomers' claims of wanting to help society, is it possible most would rather retire to a life of travel and golf?

Baby boomers could be blowing a lot of hot air. I think whether they retreat into another round of selfishness or can respond to JFK's challenge—to ask not what the country can do for me but what I can do for the country—will have to do with whether we as a society call them up to a higher purpose. We need to create the on-ramps to work that matters and embrace the talent.



## Does their romanticism blind them to the trade-offs?

There is definitely a lack of realism over what it means to do this work. That's why, if you think you might be interested in a give-back career for your encore, you should get as much experience as possible before making the leap. Boomers will do these jobs if they feel they are making a genuine impact or if their time isn't wasted and

their experience is put to good use. If these things aren't there, it becomes a question of grinding it out in a non-profit for less profit versus working for a corporation. I don't think many people will make that choice unless they are masochistic.

## What policy changes need to be made to promote encore careers?

We need to remove all barriers and disincentives that keep people from pursuing work later in life. Those policies are vestiges of the past, when we tried to push people out of the workforce.

Allowing workers over 65 to get their health coverage through Medicare would cut employers' costs and create an incentive for hiring them. We could also allow these workers to opt out of Social Security payroll deductions.

We need to duplicate programs that are already out there. One

example: Troops to Teachers, where you train retiring Army personnel to be teachers. It addresses two problems at once: helping people who have served their country and solving the teacher shortage. We also have to build new programs where there are no models. We could offer a reverse G.I. Bill that sends older workers to school to get retrained and back into the workforce quickly. Finally, we could create a gap year to provide boomers with “Encore Fellowships,” similar to the internships and fellowships college grads get when they start to try on professions.

## Will boomers take direction from bosses their kids' ages?

They will if the learning process is a two-way street. Many of the

people I interviewed said the greatest benefit of doing this kind of work is the interaction they have with young people who are idealistic, energetic, and passionate about the same issues they are. They all appreciated the chance to see that goals they hold so dear are being carried on. If the young managers can appreciate what the older generation has to offer, the boomers will be willing to give up control. | BWI

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