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Retirement

Retirement: Sixty and clout

Working in retirement can boost your finances and lift your mood. Here's how to find a job that can make your senior years truly golden.

By David Aston



Bill Barratt runs twice a week, competes in the occasional half-marathon and often listens to his iPod on his 55-minute walk to work. Nothing unusual about any of that — except that Barratt is 72. At an age when most of his peers have long since retired, he still looks forward to heading into the office every day. “I just enjoy going to work,” says the former Bank of Canada economist, investment banker and management consultant. His current employer is Metasoft Systems Inc. in Vancouver, a firm that helps non-profit organizations get funding. Barratt enjoys supporting the worthy activities of his clients. He also values the paycheque he earns, because his 16-year-old daughter will soon be heading off to university. Above all, though, he likes the mental stimulation that goes with working. “It’s my anti-Alzheimer’s pill,” he quips.

Barratt is already living what many people believe will become a new norm — working well past the traditional retirement age of 65. Some companies are offering “phased retirements” to long-term employees with hours that gradually taper as you get older. Other employers are trying to lure back retired workers and persuade boomer managers to keep working longer by offering them flexible hours and other inducements. “We’ve got this whole new world which is really opening up for people and we’re at the very beginning of it,” says Barbara Jaworski, chief executive officer of the [Workplace Institute](#), which does training and consulting for organizations around older workforce issues.

But tapping into these expanding opportunities is a lot easier for some people than for others. Colin Wright, a 61-year-old instrument technician, lives in Georgina, about an hour north of Toronto. He has been looking for a job since the factory he worked at shut down a year ago. He’s sent out hundreds of resumes and landed interviews with two employers, but nothing has panned out. Demand for his skills is tied to the fortunes of manufacturing and he’s seen economic conditions in the industry go from bad to worse. Now “there’s nothing out there in my field.” Fortunately Wright’s wife has a good job and the

couple's finances are in decent shape. But "it's not all about money," he says. "You miss having a job, that's the top and bottom of it."

The older workers in the best position are professionals, white collar employees and skilled trades in certain industries. "If I had 25 certified accountants I could place them tomorrow," says Sarah Welstead, managing partner for [Retired Worker](#), which operates a Canada-wide website for retired workers. On the other hand, forestry and manufacturing workers like Wright may find it next to impossible to find anything in their own industries. Those sectors are shedding workers of all ages, not hiring them.

No matter what skills you possess, it's vital to stay flexible if you want to find work past 60. Your search for work may involve taking a cut in pay, or learning a new skill, or starting your own business.

You will find that some organizations are more attuned to older workers than others. For instance, [HSBC Bank Canada](#) realized a few years ago that it could lose large numbers of baby boomer bankers to retirement at the same time, says Pat Brosseau, a vice-president of human resources with HSBC. To avoid a mass exodus, HSBC introduced programs such as phased retirement, the ability to work from remote locations, and sabbaticals to try to keep older bankers longer. HSBC even started luring retired bankers and older workers from other institutions.

There's a strong possibility that other organizations may follow suit. A 2008 [Conference Board of Canada](#) study found that more than three out of four organizations expect the retention of workers over 50 to be a focus within the next few years. But expect competition for the work that is available. As Jaworski says, "Employers aren't going to want to keep everybody."

You should be prepared to sell yourself. It helps to face preconceptions head on. Employers value older workers for their maturity, work ethic, reliability and ability to interact with customers. On the other hand, employers worry about older workers' strength and health. Companies aren't sure if older workers' skills are up to date and doubt their ability to learn new skills. To overcome these concerns, you need to work extra hard at presenting your strengths. Here are tips that can help:

Use flexibility to your advantage

Making it clear that you're happy with temporary or contract work can give you an advantage over career-minded younger workers, says Welstead. "Older workers are presenting an attractive solution these days because [hiring managers] aren't getting permission for adding permanent headcount, but they are getting permission for contract [workers]," she says.

Demonstrate adaptability

Employers want people who can learn new skills and respond well to change. You can highlight your ability to adapt by listing your accomplishments in different roles on your resume. Even listing an evening course or two can demonstrate that you are willing and eager to learn.

Be selective with your experience

If you've had lots of jobs over the years, don't list them all, says Welstead. They just highlight your age. While you're at it, remove the years you graduated from high school or university — they can date you.

Be clear about pay expectations

If you're interested in a job that pays less than you earned in your former career, be clear that you're flexible on pay. Don't scare off employers who think that you're out of their price range.

Show you're active

Your trim and energetic presence in an interview will help demonstrate this. So can your resume. Play sports? Be sure to list them. Same for community volunteering. Even mundane activities such as walking can help demonstrate your fitness level. A major car rental company used to recruit older mall walkers for jobs shuttling cars, says Jaworski.

Remember: appearances count

Make sure your haircut and clothes are up to date. "You can't be wearing a suit you wore 20 years ago to an interview," says Jaworski. One good way to demonstrate that you're up to date? Take your BlackBerry out of your pocket before the start of the job interview, turn it off, and put it on the table, says Welstead.

Get help

If you're unfamiliar with today's practicalities in finding a job, get advice. A number of federal and provincial programs for the unemployed can provide this. Your local Service Canada Centre is a good place to start.

Think broadly

If your specific job skills aren't opening up any doors, it's time to emphasize your life skills. Well-developed people skills can open doors into customer service or sales. If you worked with your hands, you might find work in a paint shop, hardware store or doing home maintenance servicecalls.

Demonstrate you're keen

Attitude is everything, says Christine Stoneman, chief operating officer of [GT Hiring Solutions Inc.](#), which provides placement assistance in British Columbia. Show enthusiasm, particularly when you're going for a position with less pay or prestige compared to previous jobs you've held, she says. Even if you have all the right qualifications, an employer won't hire you if you give the impression you feel the job is beneath you. On the other hand, if you show eagerness, employers will often overlook a shortage of qualifications and may even be willing to train you on the job.

Retrain

If you need new skills, consider short courses that can develop practical job skills quickly. Often government programs will pay the cost for courses covering such basic retail skills as working a cash register. If you have a mechanical bent, taking a course in a straightforward technical skill such as air conditioner repair might be useful, says Jaworski.

Speak up

If you're an older worker in your 60s who wants to stay with your employer but in a different capacity, don't be afraid to discuss the options with your organization. They may not have formal programs offering flexible arrangements to older workers, but they'll often work something out if they want to

keep you, says Prem Benimadhu, vice-president governance and human resources management research at the Conference Board of Canada. “Informal policies precede formal policies,” he observes.