

Working in retirement

Back in the '80s, as working parents of young children, we lobbied for flexibility in the way we worked. Flextime, job-sharing, telecommuting, and com-

GUEST COMMENTARY

CAROLA GREENFIELD



pressed workweek were the buzzwords. Now, two decades later and, hopefully wiser, we once again seek choice and flexibility, but this time in retirement.

One important choice is whether to work, and if so how to do it. According to a recent Wall Street Journal series, "Retirement, Interrupted," many are choosing to work in retirement. But why are they choosing it and what does working in retirement really mean today? Here are some not-so-random thoughts about the meaning of "working in retirement".

Working in retirement could mean "phased retirement," or gradually cutting back on the hours and commitments at your current job to enable you to "ease into" this new phase. This transition time enables you to plan for what your retirement will actually mean. Although flexible work arrangements have become more popular workplace practice today, they have not adequately been promoted as a framework for phased retirement. Unfortunately, the realities of employer and government benefit plans pose a barrier to this otherwise wonderful way to work in retirement.

Working in retirement could also mean "designer retirement," i.e. crafting your work commitments to include only

those things you liked to do and eliminating the others, while still getting paid. Now, wouldn't that be nice. How about working seasonally and having four of the winter months free to travel to warmer climates and spend time with grandchildren? Sounds wonderful doesn't it? A little creativity, marketable skills, and some retirement employment planning can perhaps make this a reality.

Working in retirement might mean "retiring from retirement." Unfortunately, many people who retired in 1999 before the stock market debacle are now, due to financial concerns, reconsidering this decision. Some people needed a honeymoon after a long working career but now, refreshed, are ready to go back to work. What's it really like to "go back in" at this age and in this economy? Is there still a lingering bias toward hiring older workers? How is the job search different at 60 than at 35? We need to begin a dialogue about these issues.

Working in retirement might mean doing unpaid work. Not all of the rewards of work are financial. There are many intangible non-financial benefits such as comradeship, challenge and purpose. Opportunities for creative, unpaid volunteer work for older adults are increasing in scope as organizations such as Civic Ventures nationally and SOAR (Service Opportunities After Retirement) locally continue to promote the concept of older adults as assets to be enlisted to address community needs. And what about those wonderful stories of individuals who have transformed volunteer work into paid positions?

Working in retirement for some people may mean working beyond retirement, i.e. continuing to work at the same position longer than anticipat-

ed. The Center for Retirement Research at Boston College reported a 2 percent jump in labor force participation among older workers last year alone and said that shrinking retirement accounts were to blame for people delaying retirement. Another reason may be the need to continue employer sponsored benefits such as health and prescription drug coverage.

Of course, for some people, working in retirement will mean working at their golf game. A recent Fortune Magazine cartoon shows two men walking together on a golf course and one says to the other, "I wanted to spend my golden years on the golf course ...but not as a caddy!" Perhaps for some of us that would be an acceptable option for working in retirement!

I'm sure each of you can come up with your own definitions for working in retirement. And while finances, health, family and personal preferences all help define this concept, the key to successful working in retirement for all of us will be "choice." That's the one thing *everyone* wants in retirement.

For some enlightened discussion, plan on attending the next Discovering What's Next Forum at the Newton Free Library on the topic of Working in Retirement: Opportunities and Realities. Thursday, March 27 at 7 p.m. Call 617-796-1360 for more information.

Carol Greenfield is founder and president of Senior Web Solutions, a computer training and support business working exclusively with older adults. Carol is also chairperson of the Discovering What's Next: ReVitalizing Retirement initiative. She can be reached at cag@seniorwebsolutions.com.

*Newton TAB
March 19, 2003*