

CALLING IT QUILTS — OR NOT

Recent surveys point to a growing trend: Working in retirement.

BY DAVID WHITEMYER

When asked about his lengthy career, comedian George Burns once joked, “Retirement at 65 is ridiculous. When I was 65, I still had pimples.” It turns out that a lot of folks agree with Burns.

A survey released in September 2002 by AARP revealed that 69% of workers age 45 to 74 plan to continue working into retirement, according to “Staying ahead of the curve: The AARP work and career study.” This high number challenges our current definition of retirement. The big question, obviously, is “Why?” Why are more aging adults choosing to work when our social traditions tell us they should be playing golf and going on cruises?

The bulk of those surveyed — 70% — fall into the baby boomer category (those born between 1946 and 1964). Where retirement once meant a mere five to 10 years of fun in the sun, baby boomers — because of quality health care and longer life expectancies — can now expect a full two to three decades of potential time off after leaving their careers.

MORE THAN MONEY

It turns out that a lot of adults actually enjoy their work. In the same AARP study, 84% of those who said they’d be working into retirement admitted that they would do so even if they were “financially set for life.”

Money is an important factor for many adults nearing retirement. Fewer Americans are depending on Social Security. Health care is a huge expense. Fewer workers can rely on large pensions and lifelong insurance coverage. Although many retirees will be working to save money and make ends meet, the results of this study show that money really isn’t everything.

In addition to more folks working later into life, “There’s a broader trend that we call ‘cutting to the core,’” says Stephen Kraus, a partner at Yankelovich, Inc., a market research and con-



ILLUSTRATION: ERAN AHAR

sulting firm. “People are identifying what’s most important to them in life.” This trend incorporates not just those nearing old age. Yankelovich’s 2002 MONITOR report showed that a majority of both boomers and gen-Xers (those born between 1965 and 1978) plan to work, either part time as consultants, or participate in community or charity work after retirement (59% and 53%, respectively).

There is a collective social shift in cultural thinking about retirement. “It’s not just about money anymore,” Kraus continues. “Whether younger or older, we’re seeing a combination of economic factors and more psychological factors.”

WHAT WILL YOU DO IN RETIREMENT?

Ideally, retirement is your opportunity to live life your own way. According to these studies, a lot of people are hoping to spend that time starting their own businesses, volunteering at schools, experimenting with a second career, or working part time at the local hardware store — still working, but doing it their own way.

When planning your own retirement, the goal is to focus on want vs. need. If you end up working into your post-career years, you should do so because it’s an enhancement to your golden years, not a financial requirement.

Living to be 100, George Burns was, perhaps, the most famous elderly worker in the world. “Retire?” he said in another interview. “I’m going to stay in show business until I’m the only one left.” Burns didn’t need the money. He just happened to love his job.

We should all be so lucky. And we will be, if we plan accordingly.

The statements and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author. Fidelity Investments cannot guarantee the accuracy or completeness of any statements or data.

David Whitemyer writes about business and workplace culture. His plans for retirement include woodworking, book writing, model railroading, time with grandkids, tap dancing lessons, and three months in Santorini. And perhaps a bit of time at the office.