

**Massive job shortages projected from 2011 on...**a sea change re hiring practices is already in progress across most of the industrialized nations of the world, particularly in the USA **where the Obama administration is poised to launch the largest expenditure ever on upgraded and new infrastructure. A trillion dollar plus package is said to be in the works which would far exceed the 270 billion spent on the US interstate system in the 1950's which is our largest single infrastructure program to date.**

A popular perception in the workplace has always been that employers were all too eager to offer early retirement packages to encourage older workers to step aside because of their salary and benefit costs to the company. That perception may be on the way out, as the graying of the baby boomer generation is poised to leave American companies short-handed.

Concern in the U.S. and abroad is quickly approaching a watershed moment as employers are staring a shortage of workers right in the face. **In 2011**, the Employment Policy Foundation expects there to be **4 million more jobs than workers. That number is expected to rise to 35 million unfilled jobs by the 2030.**

The outcome, experts say, will be more seniors remaining or returning to a job site that will include many more post-65 workers. The terms blue-collar and white-collar workers will be joined by a new adage. The silver-collar worker.

With 76 million people in the baby boomer generation (1946-64) and just 40 million Gen-Xers, the numbers define a clear gap that will need to be filled using various strategies, including extending the typical working life beyond 65 years as advocated for years.

The trend has become so pronounced, companies have formed partnerships with the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) to create a Featured Employers community, which highlights employers who are senior-friendly. Some of the companies include big names like Home Depot, Boeing, IBM, Walgreen's, Government at all levels, Verizon, MetLife and more. As demand increases, AARP expects the list of employers eager to hire older workers will grow dramatically.

According to networking website ExecuNet, industries where seniors are seeing the biggest gains include health care, high tech, financial services, business services and defense/aerospace. And the six biggest industries where huge future gaps are expected, include retail sales, registered nurses, infrastructure growth, construction, teachers and solar/wind specialists. Retaining or hiring older workers also gives employers the loyalty advantage not to mention their typical lack of a need for employer perks re 401K's, health care, complex housing needs, etc.

According to a recent study, workers age 55 to 64 have been in their jobs three times as long as their younger counterparts. The study, released late last year by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, revealed that 25-34 year-olds averaged 2.9 years at the same job, while 55-64 year-olds averaged 9.3 years. Since turnover is costly, and the shortages of workers is expected to rise soon, **the retirement-age worker may hold more advantages than the recent college graduate.**

"We've definitely seen that older workers are more loyal," Astra Group consultant Sara Jung told Inc.com. "Younger workers are far more likely to jump ship if they get a more attractive offer." Younger workers also have significantly higher hiring "baggage" than seniors said Jung, particularly re:

- finding suitable housing they can afford for a growing family and it's unique needs.
- getting children into acceptable schools is increasingly a daunting task that often has no solution.
- frequently having student loans of a magnitude that impacts career development.
- the lack of adequate people skills, crisis management know how and other crucial job assets are often a limitation with younger workers who have not yet put in enough years on the job to utilize these frequently vital talents.

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# BIZVOICE: When workers dig in ...

By Robert W. Wendover

For the Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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**Much has been made** of shrinking baby boomer assets over the past few months. The utopian dream of retiring at 55 to the yacht and charity work appears out of touch for the foreseeable future. Like it or not, many in this generation allowed their ambitions to get ahead of reality, and now they find themselves readjusting their sights.

This generation is famous for its ability to rationalize unfortunate realities and create euphemisms to support flights of fancy. The terms “recareering” and “encore careers” come to mind. But there is more to the equation than just baby boomers and their money woes.

Regardless of their financial position, most boomers are reluctant to leave the work force.

While income plays a role, there is also the fact that many in this generation have tied what they do for a living to their identity as a person. Introduce yourself to a boomer and chances are he or she will include a job title in the first few seconds of conversation. Assemble a few of them at a gathering and they’ll find a way to talk shop. Outplacement counselors know that one of the biggest hurdles for boomers in transition is to let go of the identity they are clinging to based on a former role. An impending retirement presents them with some of this same trepidation.

Additionally, boomers have tended to use their work environment as a source for building and maintaining a social life. There’s the annual holiday party, the summer barbecue, the company sporting events and the monthly trade association meetings where 50-somethings take turns being volunteer leaders. Retirement can be the perfect storm — loss of income, loss of identity, loss of social circle. Why not remain in a role that is comfortable, reassuring and pays for the first and second mortgages?

But while boomers are planning to inhabit their jobs for an extra 10 years, it is the organizations for which they work that are now facing a dilemma of epic proportions. Businesses have long supposed, understandably, that the boomers would reach a certain age and begin their slow transition into retirement.

The previous generation took the gold watch, the pension, a few office supplies and headed to the basement workshop and the local golf course to putter around.

But boomers do not seem inclined to do so. This, of course, has thrown a wrench into all the suppositions made by those in charge of strategic planning, succession planning, and other kinds of planning. What happens when the most expensive, longest tenured, most experienced, and, some would say, most devoted contributors won’t, or can’t, leave their positions?

What happens to the emerging generation of leaders and managers who discover that the people to whom they report won’t be departing any time soon? And what happens to the generation of workers after them?

Is the U.S. work force headed for a multigenerational train wreck within organizations large and small?

Those now in their 30s and 40s began entering the work force just as the boomers assumed many of the management and leadership roles to which they now cling.

While those in this so-called Generation X assumed that things would continue to move apace, they have run headlong into people 20 years their senior who have no real plans to leave until age 70.

So what does an organization do when the positions everyone assumed would be vacated in the next few years remain occupied for an additional decade? What do the rising professionals do when it becomes apparent that there's no room for promotion?

The second question is easier to answer than the first. These young people leave, taking with them thousands of dollars' worth of training and experience.

As the economy continues to cycle, organizations will resolve some of this situation through downsizing, right-sizing, or whatever one wishes to call it. But this will only address a small part of a much larger issue.

Firms nationwide will need to come to grips with the critical challenges of succession planning, training and development, knowledge transfer and the retention of younger workers who view their jobs as contracts, not careers.

How can room be made for the new young hires so essential to the continued success of any venture?

How can those within the baby boom be successfully encouraged to share the knowledge and expertise they possess without feeling vulnerable if they do?

How can organizations promote partnerships between emerging leaders and the veteran contributors who have so much to share?

Finally, how can organizations plan strategically for a work-force transition that will be far different from the one that was expected and a departure from those of the past?

Rather than viewing older boomers as an anchor on productivity and an obstacle to work-force transition, progressive leaders will need to work proactively to find the balance between valuing the veteran contributors and fostering the growth and retention of those following in their footsteps. It won't be easy. Stay tuned.

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