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December 2006 - Newsletter

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Older Workers Are the Nation's "New Employees"

Most of us remember our parents or grandparents officially "retiring" when they became 65 years of age, or perhaps a year or two younger. They would exchange their lunch pails for fishing rods or maybe just a comfortable rocker.

But America's view of aging and retirement is changing rapidly. People over 65 will comprise 25% of the population by 2030 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and we are living longer and healthier lives. Some even say that "today's 60 is yesterday's 40." Indeed, 60-year-old Sylvester Stallone will be hitting the silver screen on December 22nd when Rocky Balboa steps out of retirement and into the ring yet again for his sixth appearance since 1976!

Similarly, many employees currently approaching the typical retirement age are looking forward to continued years of productivity on at least a part time basis. And employers are actively recruiting these individuals, many of whom are looking beyond retirement to a new and exciting evolution in their work life.

A recent study of 400 human resource executives revealed that older workers are rated much higher than other age groups on qualities such as experience, judgment, commitment to quality, attendance, punctuality and work ethic. Older workers were also cited for bringing many benefits to the organization including experience, maturity, flexibility, a sense of humor and perspective.

However, the challenge for most seniors is overcoming pervasive stereotypes and popular myths that may still exist, such as resistance to change, less energy, excessive health problems and an inability to adapt to emerging technologies.

As baby boomers born between 1945 and 1964 move into their 50s and early 60s, many have adopted a completely different view of life than their parents or grandparents and have no plans for early retirement. They feel healthy, confident and often display more stability than younger workers struggling to raise families. According to workplace consultant Odette Pollar, "It is not unusual for boomers in their 50s to be planning another quarter century of involvement in the world of work."

The good news for everyone, regardless of age, is that our individual futures offer exciting options that earlier generations could never have imagined. Some of us may still opt for the fishing pole at age 65 (nothing wrong with that!), while others will hunker down with their high-speed laptops and pursue new work-related challenges. So rather than "winding down" in mid-life, it behooves all of us to tend to our health, take stock of our dreams and plan for the next chapter of our lives!

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