

Baby-Boomers are An Asset to the 21st Century Workplace.

By

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Over the last few years, I have written about economic stress in the hope that my insight and perspective as a researcher and as a person who has first-hand experience with this growing social problem might assist in bringing some level of empowerment to others, no matter how small. But, rather than speak to a broad audience, my thoughts are specifically targeted to those who are fifty-three and older. You guessed it, baby boomers, of which I am part.

Economically speaking, this cohort of Americans has done well. Some in this group have fared quite well. We have been blamed (and rightly so) for obscene levels of conspicuous consumption and the need to engage in consumer-driven excesses. Remember the eighties and nineties with the tony apartment in the city, the designer wardrobe, the three-series BMW or exotic, depending on your automotive tastes and the reach of your wallet? What about the big house in the suburbs with square footage that was hardly used (or never used), the six-figure wine collection and the lavish vacations, just because we could afford to take them? These “things” were proof that we made it and in record time, compared to our parents’ generation. But, there is another group of baby boomers that has struggled economically and has done so for years, even decades, despite their credentials, and who are socially and economically dislocated from their far more well-heeled brothers and sisters, ten years after the *Great Recession* began. Oh, but it gets worse. For those of us who are forced to be in the workforce until we die because our savings and/or investments for retirement have been depleted or never existed, age bias is in full effect. This includes sentiments from those in younger generations who are saying, “You had your time, it’s our time, now, so get out of the way!”

These are harsh truths but I offer another point of view and it is to look at how far baby-boomers have come. Our paths may have been far from ideal but we hold decades of experience, work-related and life-related, that provide us with a level of wisdom that we simply could not have possessed thirty, twenty or even ten years ago. Our capacity to accurately size up a person or a situation in an instant and to make the best decision about how to proceed has never been higher. The ease with which we can build relationships, professionally and personally, makes life coaches smile with pride and joy. Our ability to adjust to and manage situations that might render others incapacitated because of the levels of stress that are produced is a thing of beauty to behold. Setting limits, unapologetically, rather than to forsake ourselves for the wrong reasons to make others feel better, helps to keep us in balance. These attributes are matched by our facility with precise thinking, as we are finally comfortable or at least far more comfortable in our own skin. These are baby-boomer assets. Do we still have work to do? Of course, there is always room for growth.

In my estimation, America is on the leading edge of a national emergency which is being largely ignored from a policy level and which will get worse if nothing is done. More baby boomers than expected will have to remain in the workforce until we die. Some are forced to take social security early because we can't find work. Others are being displaced by "future of work" and smart cities, both a part of the digitized and automated brave new world that may potentially be economically catastrophic for millions of people in America, not just baby boomers, so stay tuned.

One thing is certain and that is baby boomers bring more knowledge, wisdom, experience and grit to the workforce than at any other point in our lives. Why not leverage this, not to displace but to empower younger generations of workers with these lessons while providing us with meaningful work as well that pays livable money? As I wrote in my book on economic stress, "show me a person without a mentor and sponsor and I'll show you someone whose potential is not being maximized." Baby boomers represent a vast pool of human capital that is right at society's fingertips and, to this boomer, is significantly underutilized. Does America (and indeed the world) have the good sense to grab this capital while it can? I certainly hope so, for everyone's sake.

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