

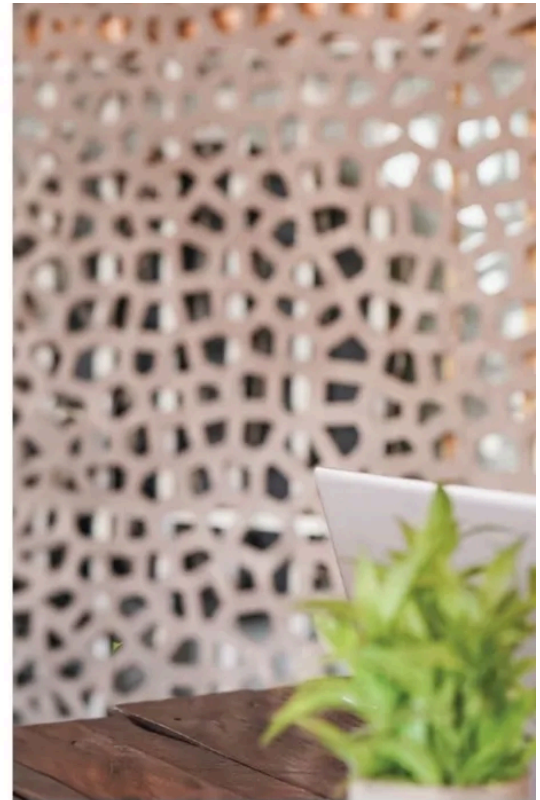
PERSPECTIVES

RETIREEES AREN'T DONE ...

They Just Found Meaning

*Their second act teaches how to
bring fulfillment to work.*

BY DANNY GUTKNECHT



Retirees aren't exactly riding off into the sunset. Instead of settling into scenes of leisurely living, many are dressing up for a second act. But this time, it's not about reprising old roles; it's about exploring meaning at work. What retirees are discovering is a potent lesson for the rest of us: Why wait to align our career journey with deeper fulfillment when we could be doing it right now?

Finding meaning in retirement

This summer, The Atlantic's Kate Cray revealed that many retirees find work more fulfilling than ever after leaving their jobs. These individuals are rediscovering their careers with a newfound sense of purpose, showing us that retirement is an opportunity for a new chapter in one's life journey. The 65-and-over crowd isn't slowing down—they're revving up! Their workforce participation was 25.8% in 2021 and will likely hit 30.7% by 2031.

Why are these 'seasoned' folks dusting off their briefcases? CNBC breaks it down like this: 57% chalk it up to personal reasons and 52% just got plain bored. Sure, financial needs are on the list, but let's be clear. Cray's onto something when she says retirees are diving back in for a hearty serving of meaning. They are heading back to the office in search of a new passion and source of income.

Instead of making it the new norm to attempt an early retirement only to go back for a second act, we should be

learning from their experiences and mistakes. Instead of needing to take another shot later, let's get it right the first time and find meaning at the beginning of our careers.

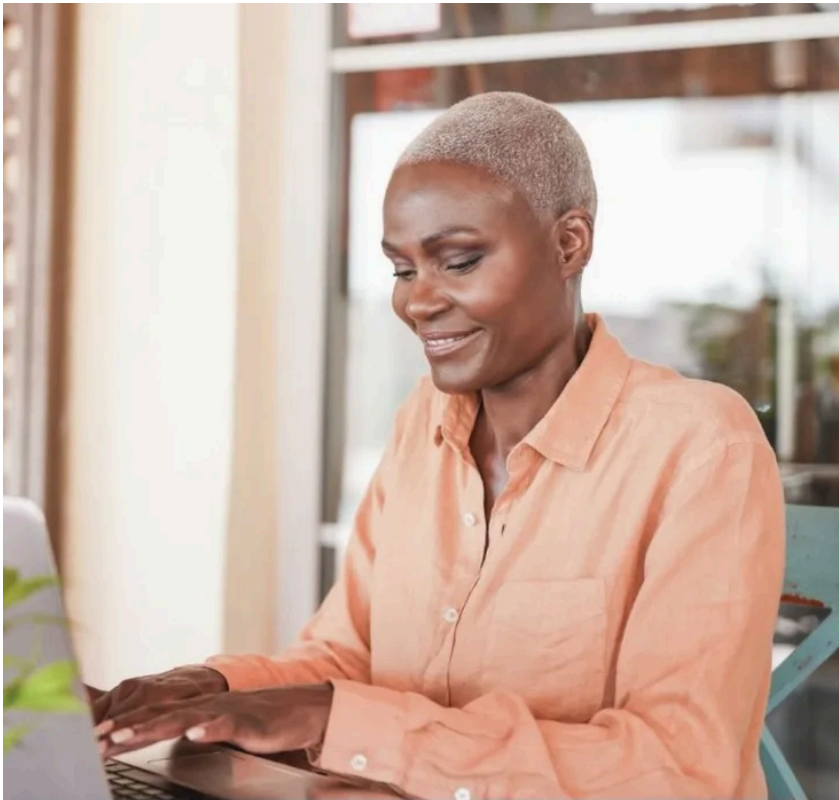
Is it about more than balance?

While the younger workforce is obsessed with career growth and societal norms, retirees offer a new narrative—finding true fulfillment in work. They've experienced various career cycles and are now choosing work that brings them meaning. Could it be that the lived journey offers wisdom that showcases the growing importance of integrating work and life?

Our early years consist of pursuing the world's ideas of success and proving oneself, while climbing the ladder in front of us. We pursue that high-paying gig, crush it, and climb higher to a fancier job that lets us buy fancier stuff. Yet too many are busy hunting for the next big break and don't notice the need for resonance and oomph in life.

But today's retirees are on a quest for workplace fulfillment. As we bob and weave through a volatile economy and technology threatens to replace jobs, these silver-haired sages show that meaning isn't some luxury; it's the main course. We are waking up to the fact that everyone has a work journey, and we are free to swap out the empty grind for work that has meaning to us.

Not the kind of success conformity so many pursued for years. Retirees show us that even when the world's a hot mess, there's a way to find a career with soul.



Is retiring a dead end?

Not everyone is grabbing the wheel of life; 62% of Americans still daydream about that elusive R word—Retirement. Why, then, are we so obsessed with punching out? Is it because many work environments or bosses are challenging or do so many despise their jobs? There's a secret sauce that makes this retirement rush less tempting: Meaning.

Meaning is how we go about living our lives. Unlike universal truths or axioms, meaning is deeply personal and distinctive to each individual, much like a fingerprint or DNA sequence. As we learn from Blue Zones and other research, meaning drives our psychological and physiological well-being, granting us resilience.

All the workplace phenomena we've seen burst onto the scene lately—the great resignation, quiet quitting, and bare-minimum Mondays—point to the elephant in the room: We are experiencing a massive socioeconomic shift in values. We are reassessing meaning in life, which includes our relationship to work.

Research shows 89% of Americans were officially burnt-out last year. And yet, the sobering math shows the average American logs about one-third of their lifetime on the clock. That means the quality of those work hours has ripple effects across the rest of our waking (and sometimes sleeping) life.

So why droll through existence while planning to be a zestful retiree seeking Act Two. Particularly when people faced with retirement are returning to work as an instrument of meaning when you can start living a life that's interesting to you now. We can take wisdom nuggets from those who are more experienced and apply them a little earlier in life.

Then, perhaps, you won't look back, asking, "What if?" You'll be too busy living your best life. 🌟

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“We must shift our thinking away from short-term gain toward long-term investment and sustainability, and always have the next generations in mind with every decision we make.”

– Deb Haaland, U.S. Secretary of the Interior and member of the Pueblo of Laguna