

Third Age Can Bring New Beginnings

Third agers, second lifers, grey panthers, baby boomers, seniors, the sandwiched generation and many more labels are being imposed on those who are over 45 by sociologists, life coaches, political commentators and the media. These labels often obscure the need to make the second half – indeed, the last half – of our lives a fulfilling, life-extending experience.

The first half of our lives teaches us many things. One is that our life journey comprises an unpredictable mixture of expected and unexpected events – both pleasurable and many less so – as well as non-events, i.e. those we expected to occur but have not.

As we pass midlife, we can find ourselves confronting a range of such events, prompting issues needing to be resolved. These can be an urgency to turn undefined or suppressed dreams into realities; or exploring clear and imaginative part- or full-time retirement plans; being outplaced from our employment and looking for ways to begin anew; seeking to define our purpose away from traditional linear careers towards a range of paid and unpaid activities of choice rather than of necessity; facing the option of voluntary redundancy; desiring new learning of a nature that stimulates our growth as a person, not just for a career advancement advantage; or looking for ways to improve our work-life balance as we experience deleterious effects on our relationships from too much of the former.

Options previously considered impractical are open to evaluation and decision-making freedom. We can resolve to make our own changes without having to attend innumerable meetings as probably occurred in the past and can make them at our own pace. The outcomes could be:

- A holistic plan for my next life stage.
- Pragmatic assessment of what is possible; what is less so.
- Expanded awareness of my options – paid and unpaid.
- Enhanced feeling of being more in control of my life direction.
- Empowered to turn my plans into realities, optimistic and eager to implement.

Consider just some of the options in Figure 1: Life Planning Options. Any one or a combination of these events are an opportunity to decide on changes, i.e. to allow to happen what may have been put off for many years.



Figure 1: Life Planning Options

<input type="checkbox"/>	Seek full-time employment	Earning income in similar work to your current career.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seek flexi-work employment	Part-time hours or job share, e.g. two people sharing one job for, say 2.5 days per week each or one works mornings, the other afternoons; or 'slot pooling' e.g. five people share three full-time jobs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seek work as contractor	Work assignments of a long-term nature as a subcontractor, not as an employee.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Telecommute	Home-based work tasks using technology.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change career content	Identify new career field via self-assessment and exploration which suits your revised life and career needs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seek unpaid work	Apply your energy, motivations, abilities and maturity to volunteer activities providing services to others.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create own business	Be entrepreneurial and take carefully calculated risks creating your own commercial enterprise.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seek project or contract assignments	Assignments where you work and earn for a specified period of time.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seek mentoring role	Apply your learning about life, relationships and work to the guidance of others younger than you.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enrol in educational course	Engage in studies for the joy of learning and intellectual stimulation rather than as an investment in a career.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seek portfolio of life-work activities	Use your skills and knowledge in several concurrent activities, either income-earning or not.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Negotiate phased retirement	Scale back working hours with current employer.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bridge employment	Alternate periods of disengagement from the workforce with periods of temporary, occasional or self-employed work.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Take a sabbatical	Take a long break from work and other commitments to pursue a particular interest or enjoy an adventure.



Transition making

So, how do we move to the next life stage, whether into our consolidating forties, our flourishing fifties, adventurous sixties or serene seventies?

Changes require transitions, i.e. a journey having several important steps taken in a deliberate sequence in order to cope with them well. As you re-examine your life during this transitional time, you empty or discard what is no longer of importance, sort out what is worth repairing and polishing from what has outlived its usefulness in order to find your essence again. You will then move on to experience a renewed zest for life. Now is not the time to downsize your dreams. It is a time to increase your optimism and be adventurous in your decision making. It is a chance to set priorities about how you will spend your time and allow your playful creative side to expand at the expense of your cautious safekeeping self.

Once you get started, you will experience new insights about yourself occurring at odd times – when you are showering, eating, meditating, driving or walking. That’s the nature of things when you commit yourself to this life review process.

Self-assessment is the first step in the life review and renewal planning process. While you may think you know yourself well, it is important to take an up-to-date audit of yourself. Critical aspects, such as your values and preference for using certain skills, may have changed since you previously considered them. Your transition planning will be more effective if you assess thoroughly your personal resources and what you really want in terms of activities, whether paid or unpaid, or a combination of both.

Self-assessment involves asking yourself complex questions while sifting progressively through data about yourself. Allow yourself time to think deeply. Be honest with your responses. An inventory, or aspects of one’s self-image as it is sometimes referred to, has been built up of all one’s experiences including the successes and failures, good and bad times.

You are now in the process of planning the next steps for your life. You are selecting new activities which incorporate your own balanced plan of leisure, relationships, work wellness and desired new learning. You have given yourself permission to look at who you really are and what you want. You can then enjoy the fruits of your preparation and the investment of your emotions and labour. What may some of these fruits be? Here are two examples – mentoring and work options:

Mentoring

Mentoring is an activity that can be very rewarding when we are in the second half of our lives. Mentoring provides a way for continued achievement, recognition and value. It involves transferring one's own achievements to the satisfaction derived from helping the achievement of another person who is usually younger. Mentoring is an opportunity to pass on what, over the years we have taken so much trouble to learn. Mentoring is an alliance of two people that creates a setting for dialogue that results in reflection, action and learning for both. It can provide rewards of meaning, fulfilment and usefulness.

World-of-work options

There is new reality about working. We now have the opportunity to see our employment as a series of successive contracts where our relationship with each employer or engaging organisation is a transactional arrangement. This negotiated agreement is for only as long as there is a need for specific work to be done. We can, therefore, be portfolio careerists where we have a portfolio of skills and a portfolio of clients, i.e. employers or organisations either for-profit or not-for-profit or both.

Instead of entering a hierarchical arrangement of job positions, we can be engaged to accomplish specific tasks. We no longer have to fill a position, but match our skills with contract requirements. We used to search for a 'job box' we could fit into. Now we search for a niche – a custom-fit solution using our transferable skills to an organisation's need.

In portfolio working we derive our work satisfaction from accomplishing tasks and the intrinsic motivation that results from this. We can string together a series of work engagements using our different attributes, different sets of skills, knowledge and interests. We can rearrange our employability offerings many times in packages of differing content according to our inclination, personal circumstances and the labour market situation. We can frequently re-cluster and repackage our skills acquired over the previous 25 years or more to meet new opportunities.

As a portfolio worker, we can be engaged as a contractor, job share, freelance, temporary hire, free agent, volunteer or casual. We can grow personally without dependence on one organisation and exercise our new freedom to undertake assignments compatible with our values. We give our allegiance to our professional skills and standards. We are focused on our lifestyle with a symbiotic relationship of consumerism and an ethic to contribute to work with meaning.

Sometimes we may work as a 'satellite' worker from or near our home, on-line through our computers and modems, on client's sites or in a different country from where we are deriving our income.

The framework or structure of a planned portfolio replaces the questionable security of full-time employment. The new structure is an important part of regulating and enjoying life. Income may come from several sources, not one as was the case in the past.

Preparation

When you can complete the checklist in Figure 2 you are ready to go hunting for your work-life goal.

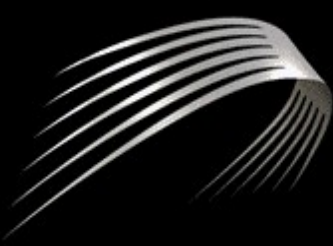


Figure 2: Are You Ready?

To confirm that you are ready to move on in your transition journey, read the following checklist of important actions and confirm that you have completed them:

Self-Assessment

- I have assessed my current situation and inventory of my thoughts about my transition
- I have a list of my paid work likes and dislikes and my reasons for them
- I have identified what motivates me and my interest's
- I have analysed my finances (savings, investment income and expense requirements)
- I have identified how to continue learning

Interpreting Data

- I have a summary of my preferred skills, values and desired activities
- I have drafted a plan of action steps which should provide opportunities for improving life satisfaction

Opportunity Awareness

- I have explored several activities and gathered relevant, realistic information
- I have a list of discarded activities, together with the reasons for my decision to discard them
- I know what work – paid and unpaid – is my target

Decision Learning

- I have defined for myself what aging means to me
- I am making decisions based on what I have learnt
- I have researched, evaluated and decided how I will get where I want to be
- I have discussed my future plans with the significant others in my life

Transition Training

- I have thought out my transition strategy and have discussed the strategy and its rationale with my spouse or partner, career helper or life coach, support group, best friend, mentor or sponsor
- I have the enthusiasm and optimism to put my planning into action
- I know about current technology, e.g. the Internet, Word, Excel, etc. to a proficiency level that I can use effectively on my own, if needed

If having gone through these exercises you feel that you need support, contact the Career Association within your area for details of certified Career Coaches.

About the Author Paul Stevens

Paul Stevens, B.Bus., founded The Centre for Worklife Counselling in Sydney in 1979 following a 21 year career in Human Resources Management and The Worklife Network – a national and international affiliation of adult career specialists – in 1986. He wrote his first published contribution to adult career development in 1981, Win That Job!, closely followed by Stop Postponing the Rest of Your Life. Over 35 further titles, booklets and career assessment instruments have been published since, the latest being A Passion for Work: Our Lifelong Affair and My Third Age: Work & Life Choices.

Paul's dedication to assisting adults in transition has been recognised in many ways – he is Fellow of the Australian Association of Career Counsellors (AACC) and in April 2000 was awarded their highest honour, Life Membership; former Research Fellow in Adult Career Development, University of Wollongong; former Member, Board of Governors, Institute of Career Certification International (ICC International); Member, Asian Accreditation Panel for Career Management Certification (AAPCMC); Fellow Practitioner and World Council Australian Representative, Association of Career Professionals International; Honorary Member, Professional Résumé Writing & Research Association; Board Member, The Career Development Leadership Alliance; Honorary Member, Elite Performers Lifeskill Advisers Association; Honorary Member, Asian Association of Career Management Professionals (AACMP); Director of Studies for the eLearning global facility, The College for Career Practitioners, recipient of the Career Counselling Excellence Award from the AACC in conjunction with its sponsor, New Hobsons Press; and Author and Designer of Worklife's CareerMastery® Virtual Career Centre.