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## Why retire just when the workplace is getting interesting?

**By Liz Taylor**

*Special to The Seattle Times*

Here are two sides of the same coin. A headline recently announced, "101-year-old has no plans to retire."

It said Ray Jenkins of Vermont was still working full-time in his nearly 30th year of his third or fourth major career, and he didn't intend to stop.

Two weeks later, a column appeared in MarketWatch, reporting that age bias among employers runs deep in the United States.

Or at least that's the perception among many workers, it said, but the reality is difficult to prove or quantify. What is known is that older workers have a harder time finding new jobs than do younger workers.

This coin is about to flip. Jenkins is our future; age bias is not. You don't have to be a math whiz to understand why. As I wrote last week in the first of this two-part column, 78 million boomers are now 43 to 61 years old.

Following closely are just 40 million Gen Xers in their 30s, ready to take the boomers' jobs when they retire. Oops, I see a shortfall of significant proportion ahead. Age bias may be alive and well now (something I don't disagree with, given this nation's allergy to all things aging). However, within the decade we're likely to see a labor shortage on a magnitude that will make our heads spin.

As I mentioned last week, employee perks — sabbaticals, flexible work hours, phased retirement, job-sharing and others — will become more common as businesses try to attract and retain employees of all ages just to keep their doors open.

There is much about this trend to celebrate. Retirement for those who don't prepare has long been a time of inactivity, boredom and despair. Idle years without purpose aren't necessarily gifts.

But now, thanks to our lopsided demographics, the boomers have an opportunity to redefine their careers and the last chapters of their lives like no other generation in history. Two recent books offer insights into how to make the most of it.

"After 50 It's Up to Us: Developing the Skills and Agility We'll Need," by George H. Schofield (The Clarity Group, 2007; \$14.95), is a gem of a little book that offers advice on how to get there from here.

On an individual level, he writes, "Pioneering will be required if we're to succeed. It means entering territory that will be totally unfamiliar in some ways ... we'll need to adapt and change."

In "Encore: Finding Work That Matters in the Second Half of Life," author Marc Freedman takes a different but complementary tack (PublicAffairs, 2007; \$24.95). The founder of Civic Ventures

([www.civicventures.org](http://www.civicventures.org)) and several other nonprofits, Freedman presents a vision that is inherently optimistic, practical, productive and exciting.

Encore careers, says Freedman, offer boomers unparalleled opportunities to reinvent "retirement" by working in new ways. Some are becoming social entrepreneurs or working for nonprofits and tackling tough social challenges — for pay or not — after careers that have been less satisfying. Others are finding jobs in traditional businesses that see the value of hiring "responsible, stable grown-ups" who have a track record of experience.

Freedman gives us dozens of real-life examples of people who have created new, meaningful work for themselves. But it's not easy. Many organizations, he says, are still handicapped by old attitudes, and some sectors of the economy haven't experienced enough of a labor shortage to adopt new hiring practices.

Still, the trend is clear: Over the next decade or two, millions of us will transition to new chapters in our lives by recycling or changing what we've always done, or actually starting new careers.

I've recommended Freedman's book to many friends, especially when I hear, "My husband was forced to take early retirement, and he doesn't know what to do." Bingo.

A new program that implements Freedman's philosophy will soon take root in Seattle. Beginning in the spring, the Legacy Leadership Institute — a partnership of Antioch University and Leadership Tomorrow — will provide six weeks of intensive learning to up to 20 experienced professionals.

The goals: to transform their skills to the nonprofit sector (learning about nonprofit management, volunteer management, advocacy and other subjects), and helping the nonprofits change in order to retain this talent. Fifteen environmental organizations, from Mountains to Sound Greenway to West Sound Wildlife Shelter, will follow with a year of supervised internships. The class is based on a model developed by the University of Maryland, and research shows that most graduates find meaningful new paid or volunteer work opportunities afterward.

The deadline to apply is March 3. The tuition is \$1,500. For more information, e-mail Antioch University Seattle's Center for Continuing Education, [ce@antiochseattle.edu](mailto:ce@antiochseattle.edu), or call 206-268-4111.

*Liz Taylor's column runs Mondays in the Northwest Life section. With 30 years' experience in the field, she writes and lectures on a host of aging topics. E-mail her at [growngolder@seattletimes.com](mailto:growngolder@seattletimes.com) or write to P.O. Box 11601, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110. You can see all of her columns at [www.seattletimes.com/growngolder](http://www.seattletimes.com/growngolder).*

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