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Putting in a great encore performance

More of us are finding out we either can't afford to stop working for retirement or don't really want to. So what happens next? Tess Vigeland talks to Marc Freedman, who wrote a book about working through the "second half" of life.

TEXT OF INTERVIEW

TESS VIGELAND: Is 2007 the year you leap out of the rat race and start your retirement?

Well, more of us are finding out that we either can't afford to stop working or don't really want to. So, what happens next?

Well, Marc Freedman's written a new book with some answers to that question. It's called "Encore: Finding Work that Matters in the Second Half of Life."

VIGELAND: Marc, let's start with how you define that second half.

MARC FREEDMAN: Phrases like "the young old" have emerged or other oxymorons like "working in retirement." So you've got this extended period of time, a population explosion of people entering that period. What happens to these boomers in this new stage of life is so important.

VIGELAND: What about the financial aspect of this because the traditional model has been you hit 60, 62, 65 and you're essentially done with your working career and you have hopefully saved enough money for that to be able to happen. What's the new paradigm?

FREEDMAN: Well, we've had a 50-year deal in this country which was essentially animated by the idea of the freedom from work -- when you reached a certain point, you're reward for putting in all those years at the grindstone would be you wouldn't have to work anymore. That became a version of the American dream...

VIGELAND: As long as you saved enough.

FREEDMAN: As long as you saved enough...

VIGELAND: ...or had a pension...

FREEDMAN: ..and because we were trying to get people out of the labor force at a time when there were big labor surpluses, we gave people incentives to leave early. But now, many people are wringing their hands and saying "we can't afford tens of millions of people spending a third of their life in subsidized leisure; we need to get people to work longer" and you're starting to see the beginning of a new deal, which is saying to people "if



Senior couple sitting at a laptop
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you will work longer, and not just a year or two but put in another phase of work, we'll make it worth your while."

VIGELAND: So how do we make it worth their while?

FREEDMAN: We say to them, if you're willing to work longer, we'll meet you halfway. We'll help provide financial incentives to doing so, but we'll also provide better pathways, a new kind of higher education which can help people retool for this period of life and I think we're also going to need to give people a break. We need a national sabbatical. People are working so hard in the middle years that that don't have time to catch their breath or to even think about what they're going to do in this new period of work that could be as long as their earlier career.

VIGELAND: Hmm, interesting. How much of this is driven by the fact that baby boomer retirees -- or shall we call them "encore people" -- have famously not saved enough for retirement and it's almost become a necessity, if not a desire, to continue working beyond that 55, 60, 65 age bracket?

FREEDMAN: It is a necessity and the question is can we make a virtue out of that necessity, a genuine virtue, because a set of conditions are lining up where individuals' personal financial circumstances, the fiscal situation of the society, labor shortages are opening up and also an accumulation of evidence that continued working lives actually benefits health and longevity are all driving towards this big change.

VIGELAND: Do you mind if I ask how old you are?

FREEDMAN: 49.

VIGELAND: And have you given any thought to what you want to do in your encore career?

FREEDMAN: You know, I hadn't before I started doing this book and I'd always thought I'd have one career and I'd extend it as long as possible, but when I saw people who had managed to find a second calling, it made me look forward to this future where I might be able to apply my talents in a way that's distinct from the opportunities I've had up to this point.

VIGELAND: Marc Freedman is the author of "Encore: Finding Work that Matters in the Second Half of Life." Thanks for coming in and, although you're still quite a ways from it, good luck in your encore years.

FREEDMAN: Thank you Tess; it's a pleasure.