



Association of  
Career **Professionals**  
INTERNATIONAL

*The World's Voice on Career Issues*

## Summary Report

### Life and Work Issues in an Aging World

#### International Perspectives - New Roles for Career Professionals

Association of Career Professionals International  
14<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference Puerto Rico, June 7, 2003

An Information Forum – facilitated by:

Jean Erickson Walker – Executive Vice President, Pathways/OI Partners  
Mark Venning – Career Strategist, Change Rangers

International Representation:

**Argentina, Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, Italy, Japan, Scotland, Spain, United Kingdom, United States and the United Nations**

At the 14<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Association of Career Professionals International in Puerto Rico, over 40 career professionals from 11 countries and a representative from the United Nations gathered in a self selected group dialogue to discuss their perspectives on working with older experienced clients in an aging world. There are growing numbers of people 50 plus asking for a new kind of career conversation as they look at re-designing their life and work story. Based on current trends witnessed by the professionals in this forum the following questions were posed:

**What are we becoming as Career Professionals in our relationships with clients in an aging world? How will we adapt to new roles with our clients in a new “career designing” process?**

The clear response from this group can be best summarized in the comments of participants at the table from Argentina, Canada, Italy, UK, USA and the United Nations. As they see it, if the trend in the workplace for an aging workforce is towards re-qualification with more short term assignments that require greater adaptability - our role is to identify what the needs of organizations will be over next 10 years and develop awareness for workers to look at wider options and provide tools to help them make the best career decisions. At the same time we need to work with Human Resource and Search consultants to help change corporate perceptions of what “old” is. **In that sense we become corporate educators and influencers.**

Given the surveys, articles, statistics and suggested reading from Jean Erickson Walker and Mark Venning, combined with the real time encounters that these career professionals shared of their face to face meetings with older experienced clients, there is enough evidence to support the fact that the following trends are changing the nature of career conversations around the world.

Older experienced workers:

- feel marginalized, targeted or stereotyped in the workplace
- explore deeper meaning in life and work and desire to make a contribution
- need help to reassess, reinvent or reconnect their inherent skills and interests
- seek to retrain and become life long learners
- want or need to continue working in different ways beyond the “retirement” age
- need support with ongoing financial, health care and elder care issues

In research compiled in a handout by Jean Erickson Walker, a recent United Nations survey looked at the projected growth in percentage of the population age 65 and older, 2000 to 2020.

Country	2000	2020	% Change (2000- 2020)
Japan	17.1	28.2	53.7
Canada	12.8	18.2	42.9
Australia	12.1	16.8	39.2
New Zealand	11.6	15.6	33.7
USA	12.5	16.6	32.8
Germany	16.4	21.8	31.9
France	15.9	20.1	26.4
UK	16.0	19.8	23.6

Life expectancy is increasing and so too is the anticipated % participation rate in the workforce for people age 60 and older according to an OECD survey.

Country	1970	1995	2030
Japan	9.3	12.5	20.7
USA	9.1	5.8	9.8
UK	9.0	5.3	8.1
Canada	6.9	4.2	8.1
Australia	6.4	3.6	6.3
New Zealand	6.5	3.3	5.3
Germany	9.3	2.9	5.5
France	7.9	2.5	4.0

So around the world, if living longer is to be the norm and a gift or challenge, as suggested by Theodore Roszak in the **Longevity Revolution** (Berkley Hills Books – 2001), what are people concerned about now with respect to life and work in 2003?

Here are some recent observations based on a survey of career professionals at OI Partners Inc. and can very well be heard and echoed by numerous professionals around the world:

- 40% say between 1/3<sup>rd</sup> and 2/3<sup>rd</sup> (of what we currently label) retirement age people are seeking employment; and 45% say over 2/3<sup>rd</sup> are doing the same
- top 2 reasons why these people are interested in finding new work – financial concerns and the need to be productive
- top 3 advantages of hiring people over age 50 – depth/breadth of experience, good judgment/wisdom and work ethic
- top 4 very significant perceptions of employer reluctance to hire older workers – locked in past ways of thinking, cost too much, unwilling to deal with change and lack technical skills
- finding and losing a job are the top 2 concerns of people age 50 – 59 and for people age 60+, after health, concerns over finances and finding or losing a job appear to be linked in their importance

Beyond our role as corporate educators and influencers, career professionals form a unique relationship with clients in their personal journey inside and outside organizational life. Older experienced workers are trying to create and cross bridges into a new world we have called “retirement” but it’s a world that increasingly sounds less like a “retreat or withdrawal” or “seclusion” as the dictionary would suggest.

If a career in an aging world can be described as a “life journey”, based on the “quests of clients” heard by the career professionals in this Puerto Rico information forum, **how will we adapt and what do we become in our new roles in a “career designing” process** – helping people cross life’s bridges?

In one group with participants from Canada and the USA the response was that we need to help clients 50 plus, develop a portfolio of work skills and experience and in more creative approaches, help them find their particular mission and how to fulfill it. In addition they said that in order to help clients not work in isolation, we need to connect them with other people with shared visions but not necessarily with the same skill base where relationships are more personalized.

Another group representing Germany and regions in the USA suggested that we are more effective when are moving away from basic work search techniques, and we are helping clients in reframing or retooling themselves in the new concept of “life cycle” career development. We need to anticipate longer term needs, present different options out of the box and create links to make choices happen for clients. This means that in our “one on one” time, being more flexible in our availability, and in our “counsel/coach/consult and refer” process, develop an alignment with other resources such as elder care advisors.

One comment resounded from Argentina and Italy that we need to be more like “cheerleaders” promoting the age advantage and that we need to revamp the chronological age concept, coaching clients to develop new skills and credentials, rebuilding attitudes towards learning

technology and new languages. This “rejuvenation/reinvention” coaching as suggested by Italy is part of what we need to redefine life planning criteria.

Moving the conversation further, comments from countries like Argentina, Canada, Spain and USA made the point that self employment training is an important option to explore in later years of work life and should be included as part of the planning after organizational retirement. In areas like Argentina where unemployment is high, teaching small business skills is critical to helping clients position their abilities as a resource to companies; while in Spain teaching people how to start a business is attractive, but the culture up to now is not geared that way. Unlike Canada where the federal government has funded a Self Employment Assistance Program for over 10 years, self employment in Denmark is not an option for government criteria in judging the success rate of finding full time employment.

If the promise of long term full time employment or security belongs to a by gone day and career management has shifted from the organization to the individual even in countries such as Japan, then the process of exploring options is vital and even more heightened for older workers still too young to retire who want or need to work. Retaining older workers in different ways should be explored and career professionals could partner with clients and organizations to find better ways to position employment relationships.

According to career professionals in Canada, the UK and USA - senior management and knowledge based professionals are looking for bridged or phased retirement plans. Mobility to work in different parts of the world, giving back by serving on Boards, volunteering, working on a diversification of shorter contracts, having multiple part time jobs are all part of the wide options. These work options are not meant to be in competition with other parts of a life plan but rather part of “whole life integration”.

In our role as career “re-packagers” we may be need to shift how we market our services to older clients, many of whom have had career services before, - and in turn show them how to do the same. With shorter time frames for traditional career services being offered more often by organizations, there are opportunities for a more customized service. As observed by Mark Venning in the introduction to this forum, at a time when many are zapped by negative world news and an underwhelming corporate experience, there is potential to deliver more for older workers than what is expected by a career transition service, that arguably hasn’t moved content wise for over a decade.

And as we rethink our career materials and take a look at new professional roles with older experienced clients there are two important things we must not forget as career professionals. As pointed out by several participants we must - improve our knowledge and the way we talk about aging and encourage inter-generational relationships in the workplace and wherever we deliver career services. If one of the issues around the potential of older workers leaving the workplace is the loss of knowledge transfer, mentoring and skills shortages, one of the worst ways to lose innovation and productivity is to have an environment where people are marginalized, segmented or stereotyped by age groups. Perhaps our next information forum will pick up where we left off in Puerto Rico remembering it’s not age but attitude that shapes who we become.

Thanks to the following career professionals of ACP International for their input into this discussion. While not all specific comments were listed in this summary report hopefully the core essence of the conversation is captured here.



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