

De Niro comes of age in *The Intern*: How older employees are re-inventing themselves

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In the movie, *The Intern*, seventysomething Robert De Niro becomes an intern at a company run by thirtysomething entrepreneur Anne Hathaway. Hilarity ensues. The situation is played brilliantly for laughs, but there's nothing funny about the generation of boomers pioneering a new phase of life. We are in the midst of a talent revolution and this movie is Hollywood's nod that the aging work force has come of age.

Individuals in their 50s, 60s and beyond have known that they desire new meaningful ways to engage and contribute. *The Intern* takes this individual perspective and provides a corporate context. At a time when ageism and outdated career paths dominate, we are reminded that the future for older workers doesn't have to turn out to be a tragedy.

Most workers who are over 50 began their careers thinking that they might change companies a few times. For most of their working lives, their career end-game strategy consisted almost entirely of figuring out whether they wanted to retire at the usual age of 65 or whether they might like to keep at it into their late 60s and into their 70s. Few could have predicted that they would find themselves at age 50 or 55 – at the peak of their productivity and effectiveness – set adrift in a professional world that either doesn't want them, has changed drastically or doesn't exist any more.

Making a career change in your 50s, 60s and 70s can be highly rewarding and provide structure and meaning. This so-called "third act" can be a time when you live your legacy. However, finding the right role requires a different approach than simply posting resumes in response to jobs found online. People need to take stock of what their financial, intellectual and social needs are and then identify what they want their working legacy to be. From there, they can create a strategy that builds on their unique networks, strengths, experiences and forward-looking goals.

In the film, Robert De Niro happens to find a new role that allows him to make an impact and live a legacy. He applies to a job that is posted on a community bulletin board. In real life, finding what we call your Legacy Career is not so simple. Today's workplaces are rife

with ageism. Many hiring managers and recruiters are not aware that retirement at 65 is a 1930s model, when life expectancy was 62. Few companies have considered implementing career paths that identify specific roles ideally suited for the 50-plus work force. However, times are changing.

A more realistic case study might be the work one of our clients did to make a change after 30 years in product marketing within a bank. He wanted his legacy career stint to have a direct impact on youth. Building on first-hand experience, he re-directed his skills into teaching and became an instructor at a local college where his course material is being used to update a creaky, decades-old curriculum. An important part of his new mission is the fact that his impact will extend beyond his own classroom to play a role in making his college an innovative, dynamic place of learning that features strong practical ties to the real world.

Another client found herself downsized from her organization after 25 years of service. Initial attempts to write her resume and prepare for interviews proved unsuccessful. She didn't receive a single call. Frustrated, she resigned herself to the reality that she would never find meaningful career work again and should instead take any job. In our discussions, it became clear that even if she had found a new career within her previous sector, she would not have been happy. She was tired of the routine of the work she had been doing and had dreamed of retiring for years. She just didn't expect it to happen so soon and at the will of her employer. She was bored and her resume sounded just as boring. Successful but boring. By focusing on four questions, she was able to identify five new roles that met her needs, used her talents, was work she cared about and made an impact that was market viable. She set out a 12-month plan for how to build a new network, upgrade her skills and become known in a new professional community. Nine months later, she was hired and has never looked back.

There are countless stories of individuals seeking their own "what's next." Some have great success. For others, it is a long, hard journey. What this movie highlights in a fresh, unique way is that the real story is not about older workers seeking new jobs. It is a smart, funny depiction about the power of inter-generational relationships in today's workplace and the untapped innovation of the boomer generation.

Smart companies are starting to rethink talent strategies and career paths. Challenge Factory is seeing increased demand for strategies that identify this talent pool as a competitive advantage. For some, the solution includes programs like De Niro's internship. For others, the focus is on innovative alumni programs. In all cases, an underutilized talent pool is leveraged and all generations in the workplace benefit.

Over the next few weeks, CEOs, CHROs and other executives are invited to attend private screenings of *The Intern* in Toronto, Halifax and Calgary. They are asked to bring a mentee as their guest. These inter-generational events will challenge attendees to consider if Hollywood has gotten ahead of their own company when it comes to inter-generational work force strategy.

Lisa Taylor is President of Challenge Factory, a company that is launching Canada's first certificate program in Inter-generational Leadership, using theory, data, case studies and methodologies associated with this approach to workplace culture and employee engagement.