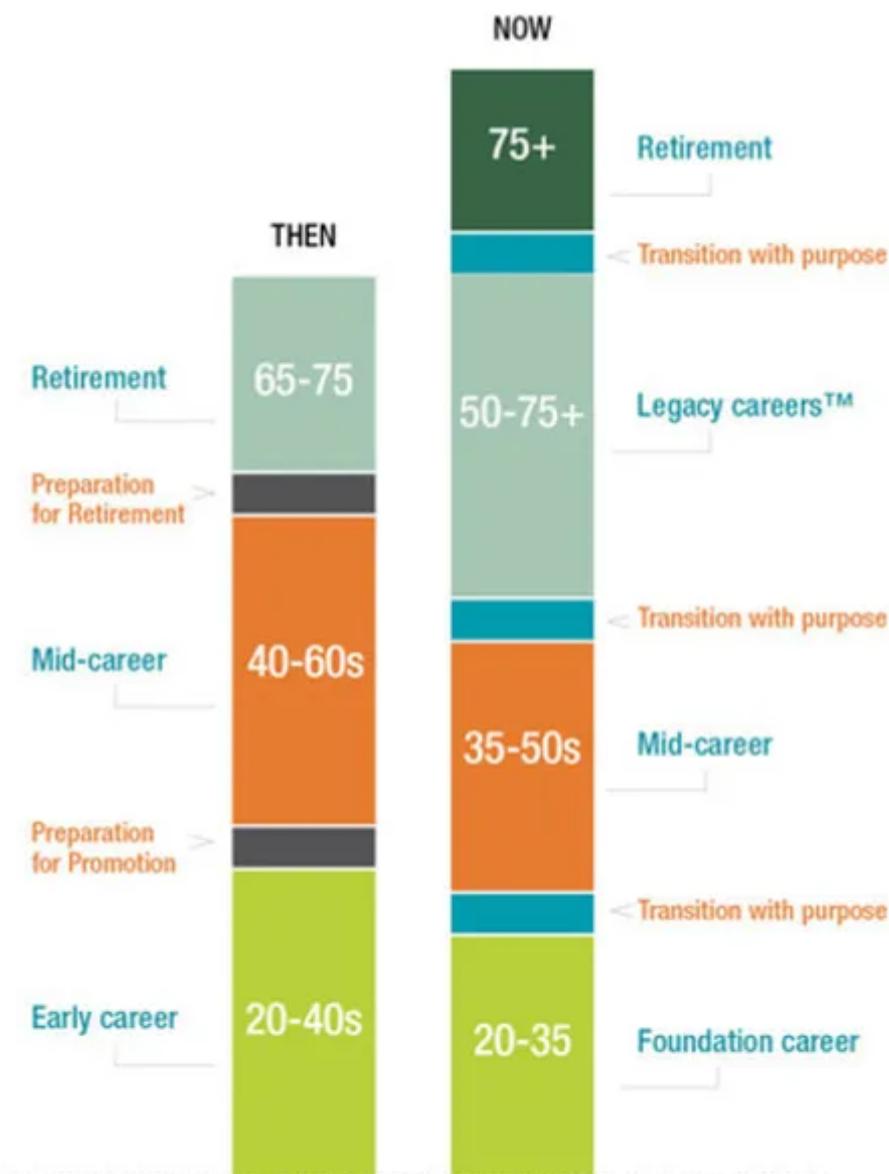


Retirement: an offensive word

thestar.com/business/small_business/exitstrategy/2012/06/01/retirement_an_offensive_word.html

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Career Timelines have Changed

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re•tire verb ri-'ti(-?)r:

1: to withdraw from action or danger : RETREAT

2: to withdraw especially for privacy

3: to move back : RECEDE

When US mandatory retirement was instituted in the 1930s, the programs applied to workers aged 65 years. Average lifespan at the time was 61.

Retirement programs were true to the actual definition of the word: programs that provided workers with support and dignity to conclude, withdraw, move back and prepare to leave society.

Today, there is no place for the term retirement when talking about people in their 50s, 60s and beyond. The act of withdrawing from society and concluding your activities is not a choice to be made, but a fact of cognitive and physical health.

In the 80 years since retirement programs were first introduced, life expectancy has gone from 61 to 81. People in their 50s, 60s and 70s (and even 80s) still have careers. But we have not updated our language or expectations. We still call people in their 60s retired, implying they should move back, conclude and not contribute or be productive.

The “retired” can and often do spend 25 years being active and contributing: for pay or as a volunteer, full-time, part-time, seasonally or occasionally. This “legacy career” period will, in fact, be a longer phase than their children’s first foundational career.

Stanford economist John Shoven declares the way we look at old-age to be old-fashioned. He suggests that, rather than considering everyone over a certain age as being “old,” we should work from end-of-life backwards.

Basically, we should reserve the terms old-age and retirement for those who are facing mobility, health, cognitive and other challenges that impair their ability to be active and contributing members of society.

I agree. To use the term in any other way is offensive. It diminishes the significant contribution Boomers will continue to make through their paid and voluntary work.

We should retire the term retirement, reserving it only to be used as originally intended—the period past average life expectancy, when we are at the end of our days—ready to really, literally, retire.

Lisa Taylor is the President of Toronto-based Challenge Factory, the only company in Canada where you can test-drive your next career. Challenge Factory provides individuals and companies with innovative talent and career programs targeting new graduates, mid-career professionals and Boomers seeking Legacy Careers.

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