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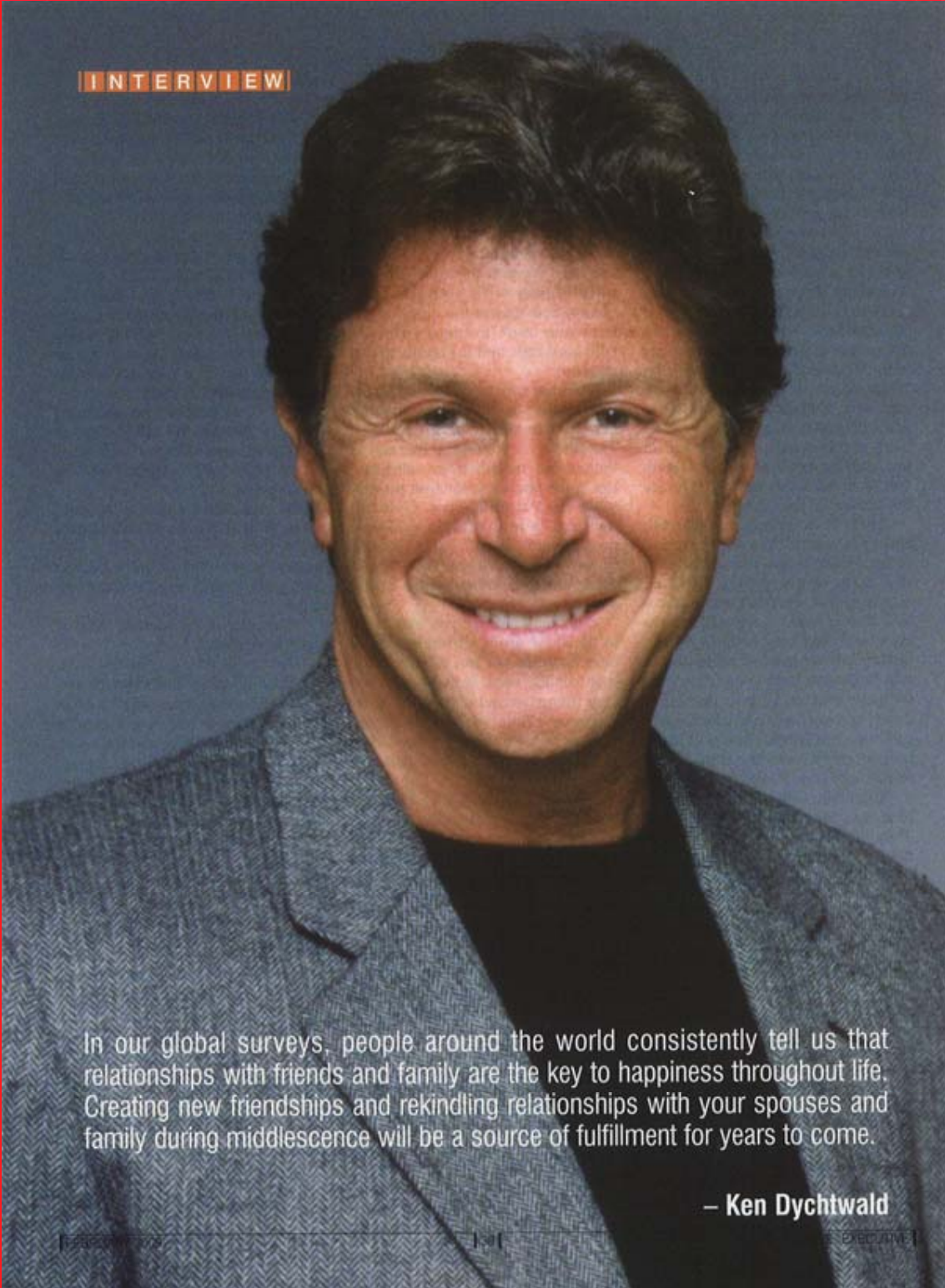
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INTERVIEWS
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INTERVIEW



In our global surveys, people around the world consistently tell us that relationships with friends and family are the key to happiness throughout life. Creating new friendships and rekindling relationships with your spouses and family during midsentence will be a source of fulfillment for years to come.

– Ken Dychtwald

➤ **What is middlecence all about? Can you give us the background for your research into employee attitudes and experience? What was the trigger point for this research?**

“Middlecence” is a stage of life that is emerging between “adulthood” and “old age.” In the last century, we experienced unprecedented increases in life expectancy. For example, at the beginning of the 20th century, the average American citizen could expect to live only 47 years. By the end of the 20th century, life expectancy in the US had increased to 78. India has seen far more dramatic improvements in life expectancy in the last century. Due to high infant mortality, life expectancy at birth in India in 1900 was just 23. Today, India’s average life expectancy at birth has risen to 65. With longer lives and increased health and vitality in our later years, we have begun to postpone old age, and to create a new middle zone of life, which I have named “middlecence.” This isn’t the first time we have seen a new lifestage emerge. For example, the idea of adolescence didn’t exist until relatively recently. At the beginning of the 20th century, people would go from being children to being adults virtually overnight; there was nothing in between. Then, as we began instituting child labor laws and creating a fuller high school experience, adulthood was postponed. A sociologist named Stanley Hall identified this emerging new stage of life and called it “adolescence.” When the baby boom generation came along in the 1950s, we did it again, further postponing adulthood by creating another new stage of life called “young adulthood.”

Today, as people begin reaching their fiftieth birthdays, they are no longer turning the corner to old age as they had done in our grandparents’ time. Instead, our “middlecent” years are becoming a time of continued vitality with an appetite for new beginnings, new careers, and productivity. So we’re not simply living longer, we’ve invented a new life stage – with more to come. People tend to assume that living longer simply means being old longer. Instead, I’m convinced that our entire concept of how we live our lives is shifting. This is an entirely new landscape that we’ve never charted before.

Our research into the attitudes and experiences of today’s workers began with the recognition of the growing numbers, importance, and influence of middlecent workers. Today, employers are experiencing an unprecedented shift in the age distribution of the labor force. This phenomenon is driven by the following three demographic realities – the disproportionate size of the baby boom generation, increasing longevity, and declining birthrates – that no organization can ignore.

- **The Baby Boom**

Nearly one-third of all Americans—76 million people—were born between 1946 and 1964. That’s a daily average of over 10,000 births in the US, with 1,000 in Canada, and comparable numbers across other major economies. This fertile period was sandwiched between the baby busts of the Depression and World War II and the Viet Nam era. At such numbers, the boomer generation has repeatedly reshaped American life and fueled

much of the productivity of the last several decades. As boomers reach traditional retirement age, how will corporations survive the massive exodus of skills, experience, customer relationships, and knowledge – a real brain drain?

- **The Longevity Boom**

Throughout most of human history, the average life expectancy was less than eighteen. A hundred years ago, only 4% of the US population was over sixty-five; now it’s 14% and rising. Thanks to breakthroughs in health care and other quality-of-life advances, more people are living longer. Consequently, all the milestones of life are shifting upward. When are we old? When are workers no longer productive? At what age do employees stop learning or seeking new challenges?

- **The Birth Dearth**

After peaking at 3.7 in the mid-1950s, the average number of children per woman in the US has declined to 2. Nearly 20% of baby boomers will have no children, and another 25% will have only one child. Declining birthrates across industrialized nations guarantee a recurrent shortage of native-born young workers. Countries with birthrates such as Italy’s (1.2), Germany’s (1.3), and Japan’s (1.4) are well below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman. In India, the birthrate has halved from almost six children in the 1950s to three children per family today.

These three factors drive what I call the “age wave,” a massive shift in the size and age distribution of the

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population. As a result of this age wave, major economies such as Japan, Italy, Germany, China, France, and the UK will begin to experience shrinking working age populations in about a decade. Unless birthrates or immigration rates change radically, the German workforce will decline by 25% in 2050, the Italian by 30%, and the Japanese by 38% in the first half of this century. Throughout most of Europe, including Russia and most of the former Eastern Bloc, the pattern is much the same. The age wave is destined to reshape the workforce and redefine how organizations must recruit and engage their employees. How can organizations better engage a growing number of midscent workers? How can they stem the "brain drain" as massive numbers of baby boomers prepare for retirement? What are the unique motivations, needs, worries,

American workforce. The massive study included interviews with 7,718 adult employees, and was designed to empower companies with landmark insights into the attitudes and needs of all generations of workers. Many of the insights from this proprietary research can be found in *Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills and Talent* written by myself, Bob Morrison and Tamara Erickson (Harvard Business School Press).

➤ **Who are midcareer employees? What are their unique/typical behavioral characteristics?**

In terms of demographics, life stage, and career stage, midcareer workers – those between the ages of 35 and 54 – are, naturally, in between the extremes of the younger and older cohorts. Many are well educated, and in the US are twice as likely as their parents to earn high school and college de-

competitive, they want to prove their worth, and so expect clear rules of performance measurement, focusing on both individual and group merit.

Unlike today's youth, this cohort did not "grow up digital," though it witnessed the advent of space exploration. The older ones were among the last to take their mathematics and engineering exams with slide rules rather than personal computers or even handheld calculators. Yet, they have learned to apply information technology quite cleverly throughout their careers, pioneering such methods as business reengineering to reshape how corporations work. Among their strengths, today's midcareer workers are motivated, flexible, and people oriented. Their accumulated experience and knowledge are valuable, and they have more soft skills and customer-service orientation than the younger cohort. Among their potential weaknesses are a distrust of leadership and tendency to be self-absorbed.

The New Employee/Employer Equation Study revealed that midcareer workers' average tenure is ten years, but that number can be deceiving: 42% have been with their employers for five years or less, and 39% for more than ten. One in four has supervisory or managerial responsibility, and among those, one in three is a midlevel or senior manager. While the preponderance are employed by for-profit enterprises, this cohort is the most likely (27%) to work in some form of government service (including government provided education and health care).

Midcareer employees work longer hours than other generations of workers, yet just 33% feel energized by their work. 36% say they feel that they are in dead-end jobs, and more than 40% report feelings of burnout. Midcareer employees are the least likely to say that their workplace is congenial and fun and that it offers ample opportunity to try new things. They have the lowest satisfaction rates with their immediate managers and the least confidence in top executives. Only one in three agrees that top management displays integrity or commit-

In our conversations with major US corporations, we discovered that while most companies were aware of these impending demographic transformations, few had developed the necessary know-how and strategies to prepare for an aging workforce.

and hopes of the different generations of workers? How can employees better appeal to and motivate each generation? How can organizations create and manage an effective multi-generational workforce in an era of unprecedented age diversity?

In our conversations with major US corporations, we discovered that while most companies were aware of these impending demographic transformations, few had developed the necessary know-how and strategies to prepare for an aging workforce. An increasingly diverse workforce requires tailored compensation, benefits, management styles, and work arrangements to meet the needs of distinct, targeted workforce segments. *The New Employee/Employer Equation Study*, conducted by Age Wave in collaboration with the Concours Group and Harris Interactive, was a landmark study to develop a deeper understanding and superior segmentation of the

generations. In the US this cohort is 76% non-Hispanic white (versus 61% for the young cohort and 88% for the mature). Perhaps most significantly, this cohort is gender diverse. The boomers were the first real industrial-age generation of working women, with 80% choosing to work outside the home for reasons other than the extraordinary circumstances of war.

Having come of age in the 1960s and 1970s – a time of global social upheaval – this cohort is cause oriented. Midcareer workers prefer to see the big picture and think in terms of a life's mission. The assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Malcolm X, as well as the civil rights movement, women's liberation, and antiwar protests, sparked the desire to do something meaningful with their lives. Thus, they hope to embrace the vision, mission, and ambition of their companies. Ambitious, idealistic, self-reliant, and

ment to employee development, and one in four often disagrees with the organization's policies on important employee matters. A fifth are seeking opportunities in other organizations, and a similar percentage are looking for a major career change. But 85% believe that career changes are very difficult these days.

Family and financial pressures outside work make them conservative in their career choices, and many cannot afford moves that would involve cuts in pay or benefits. In short, far too many midcareer employees are working more, enjoying it less, and looking for alternatives.

- **Do these behavioral characteristics change depending upon the company a person is working for (for instance a person working for a company like Google vs another person working for not so well known company) and the economic development of the country he is working in?**

middlescent workers at larger organizations and are more willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help their organization be successful.

Of course, some large corporations are also effective at engaging and motivating their middlescent workers. But our study findings indicate that larger organizations can learn valuable lessons by examining how smaller and more entrepreneurial companies create career paths that continue to inspire and engage their employees throughout their careers.

- **What role do you think a national culture and personality architecture (beliefs, attitudes, value systems, outlook towards life, etc.) would play on the kind of midcareer life a person goes through? Is there any evidence pointing either positive or negative relationship between national culture and midlife change?**

There is limited research on the

reengage in fresh activities, passions, and careers paths that give us renewed fulfillment and happiness.

- **Your research indicates that midcareer employees end up working for longer hours than their younger and older counterparts. Why?**

Our national study found that midcareer employees report the highest number of hours worked per week—average of forty-five and median of forty-two, with 30% saying they work fifty or more hours per week. As in the other cohorts, there is a significant difference by gender, with men reporting almost five hours more per week than women.

Although our study did not specifically inquire regarding the reasons for hours worked, we speculate that midcareer employees put in more hours in part because many of them are at the peak of responsibility in their companies and are significantly more likely than younger workers to be in a managerial or supervisory position. In addition, younger employees are twice as likely as midcareer employees to be working part-time, and, on the other end of the spectrum, we find that many older workers choose to scale down their work hours, often because they have fewer financial pressures to put in extra hours and have the flexibility to focus their time on work they are most interested in.

- **What were the other findings from your research? How true are they in these times of financial and economic turmoil?**

Other key findings from our research include:

- Employee attitudes, needs, and experiences are extremely diverse, and responding to them is key to gaining engagement, loyalty, and productivity.
- Too many employees are feeling burned-out (42%) and feel dead-ended in their current jobs (33%). Too few feel energized by their work or by fresh assignments (28%).
- The performance of managers is perceived as poor, with only 36% of employees saying they are satisfied

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In the *New Employee/Employer Equation Study*, we examined the attitudes and behaviors of workers across different type of organizations. We discovered that smaller companies – those with 500 employees or less – were far more effective at engaging and motivating middlescent workers than larger organizations. Middlescent workers say that smaller organizations are more likely to respect them for their abilities, provide ample opportunities to leverage their talents, empower them to explore new career directions, provide an ongoing flow of new, exciting assignments, and offer work that is meaningful and fulfilling.

As a result, our study found that middlescent workers at small companies are less likely to feel burned out or to feel they are at dead end in their careers. They are far more loyal than

midcareer lives across national cultures. However, the global study of two million people from 80 countries entitled *Is Well-being U-Shaped over the Life Cycle?*, published this year by researchers from the University of Warwick in England and Dartmouth College in the US, found that middlecence is frequently a time of uncertainty and frustration regardless of nationality, culture, gender, marital status, and income.

Nonetheless, this same research shows that people in their 60s, 70s, and 80s can be just as happy and fulfilled as people in their 20s. Therefore middlecence is a transition period that many of us experience during which we begin to redefine our life and career purpose and meaning. As we emerge from middlecence, this research demonstrates that many of us

with the support and guidance received from their managers.

- Large employers offer significantly more benefits – including things that small company employees say they want – and yet get less engagement in return.
- Mature employees (55 and older) are the most satisfied and engaged, the happiest on the job, and best adjusted to the workplace. Retaining them, including beyond the traditional retirement age, is key to preventing shortages of skills and labor and a resulting “brain drain.”

This year has been particularly challenging for both employers and employees. Many companies are reducing their workforce in response to the current economic downturn and are forced to seek greater productivity from their remaining employees. Many employees are experiencing significant uncertainty and anxiety regarding their career direction and stability. In this environment, some of the key lessons from the *New Employee/Employer Equation Study* are especially pertinent. The most successful companies in today's economy may turn out to be the ones who are able to develop targeted strategies to retain their most valuable employees, maintain a positive culture and morale despite the economic difficulties, and motivate and engage key segments of their workers to ensure continued productivity during downsizing.

- **What is your assessment of the possible impact of the US financial crisis on the midlife careers of millions of employees across the globe, let alone US? Do you think that the financial crisis would have brought in advance all the unpleasant experiences?**

Workers of all ages are feeling the effects of today's financial crisis. In some ways, midcareer workers will likely fare better than younger cohorts. Due to their greater experience and tenure, unemployment is historically lower, and the effects of recession more moderate, among older employees. For example, as of November 2008, unemployment among those age 25 to 34 in the US was 6.9% (up from 4.9% in January 2008). Among

those age 35 to 44, unemployment was 5.4% in November (up from 3.6% in January), and among those age 45-54 unemployment was 5.1% (up from 3.4% in January).

However, many midcareer workers will see their ambitions and anticipated career paths delayed for months or even years due to current economic conditions. For a cohort already likely to feel frustrated with their level of progress and fulfillment from work, today's recession is likely to increase levels of dissatisfaction even further.

- **What is your advice to all such people going through such traumatic times? What are the few things that they should keep a tab on and keep working on so that life, if not as it was, at least does not deteriorate?**

Middlescence can be a time of confusion, frustration, and burn-out. But it can also be an opportunity for personal discovery, reenergizing, and reinvention. Specific strategies I recommend to middlescents include:

- **Recognize midlife and even later life can be a time of new beginnings.**
With improved healthcare, diet, and exercise, we are living longer, and with greater health and vitality, than any prior generation. The “longevity bonus” that our generation enjoys gives us opportunities for second chances, to pursue new careers, fall in love again, go back to school, and reconnect with our families and spouses – no matter what stage of life.
- **Leverage your new freedoms.**
In middlescence you have capabilities and resources you did not have in your younger days. In this time of our lives many of us have developed knowledge, skills, relationships, and financial resources that empower us to pursue careers and activities we are most passionate about.
- **Continue learning.**
Today's middlescents are far more educated than those of earlier generations. Lifelong learning will not only continue to empower your career, but can also enrich your life with new interest and passions.

- **Forge new relationships.**

In our global surveys, people around the world consistently tell us that relationships with friends and family are the key to happiness throughout life. Creating new friendships and rekindling relationships with your spouses and family during middlescence will be a source of fulfillment for years to come.

- **Give back.**

In our youth, many of us are focused on our own needs and ambitions. As we enter middlescence, we begin to recognize that true fulfillment comes largely from what we give, not what we get. You may find that contributing time and resources to those in need, volunteering in your community, and devoting your energy to your family and children will help make middlescence and beyond the best years of your life.

- **You have observed in your (written along with co-authors, Robert Morison and Tamara Erickson) brilliantly written article (“Managing Middlescence”, *HBR*, March 2006) that, “Middlescent restlessness isn't new, but it plays out differently in different generations. It seems to be hitting today's midcareer workers harder than it hit their predecessors.” Can you take us through how the generational differences would impact middlescent restlessness?**

There are three major differences between today's midcareer workers and those of prior generations which can affect how they experience middlescence. First, their lives and family responsibilities are often far more complex and demanding. Many married later, and some had multiple marriages, creating blended families with step-children and multiple in-laws. More than among any prior generation, today's midcareer women are likely to be working, adding to the stress and responsibilities as couples attempt to balance work and family life. Meanwhile, many are now caring for aging parents just as they are raising children, managing increasing job responsibilities, and attempting to

save and prepare for their own retirement.

Second, today's midcareer workers can expect to live longer, and with greater health and vitality, than prior generations. Increased longevity means that many midcareer workers will have time to learn new skills, start another career, or build an entrepreneurial business. But it also means that those without sufficient financial resources may have to work for many more years at a job they don't really enjoy.

Finally, today's many midcareer workers have dramatically different attitudes and expectations for their work and careers. With such formative experiences as the Vietnam War, the impeachment of Richard M. Nixon, or the Cultural Revolution in mainland China, they tend to eschew authority, break rules, experiment, demand participative management, and value horizontal over hierarchical organizations. They also have greater ambitions to impact and shape the world around them. In middlecence many are asking themselves: Have I had the impact I expected to have? How can I make the next phase of my life as meaningful as possible? Many are willing to trade some of their current success for greater significance in their lives and work, even if that means doing something altogether different.

➤ **Almost all of the middlecent employees get disenchanted and frustrated. What according to you are the sources of frustration and how to protect oneself from all such frustrations?**

In our research we identified seven key risks sources of frustration that midcareer workers should anticipate and prepare for:

- **Career bottleneck.**

The baby boom generation is large, and too many people are competing for too few leadership positions in organizations that have been shedding layers of hierarchy. Midcareer workers need to recognize they may have to work harder for promotions than prior generations, and plan their career path smartly and creatively. Prior generations may have found their careers and

promotions to progress more smoothly. Today's midcareer workers may find it helpful to develop and pursue explicit two, five, and ten year plans describing their career priorities, goals, potential pitfalls, and strategies for their careers.

- **Work/life tension.**

Midcareer workers are sandwiched between commitments to children and parents, often at the same time that their work responsibilities are peaking. More than among prior generations, career management requires thoughtful coordination of family responsibilities with spouses and family members and sometimes the postponement of career ambitions to focus on family priorities.

- **Lengthening horizon.**

Those who are not accumulating

can explore continued learning opportunities both inside and outside their companies, including formal training programs, mentoring programs, evening classes, and new roles that expand your capabilities.

- **Disillusionment with employers.**

This includes insecurity and distrust following waves of downsizing, as well as resentment over the enormous compensation gaps between top executives and almost all other employees. In times of economic uncertainty, middlecent workers can be particularly prone to frustration and disillusionment. It is important to recognize that this is natural during this time in your career and to remain focused on your long-term goals and how to achieve them.

Today's many midcareer workers have dramatically different attitudes and expectations for their work and careers. Midcareer workers are sandwiched between commitments to children and parents, often at the same time that their work responsibilities are peaking

sufficient wealth for retirement face the prospect of having to work many more years. Many of today's midcareer employees have been lavish spenders and sparse savers. One of the most important questions in later life is whether we will work because we want to work or because we have to work. Will we have the freedom to take time off when we want or need it? Will we have the flexibility to "downsize" into a less lucrative career or position that we are more passionate about? Increasingly, financial planning is an important part of career planning. Adequate savings is the key to having the flexibility to pursue work that is fulfilling and engaging in our later years.

- **Skills obsolescence.**

Some struggle to adjust to new ways of working and managing in the information economy. In today's fast-paced world, lifelong learning is a requirement for career advancement. Midcareer workers

- **Burnout.**

People who have been career driven for 20 or more years are stretched and stressed, find their work unexciting or repetitive, and are running low on energy and the ability to cope. Midcareer workers may find they can avoid burnout by identifying and pursuing work activities that most motivate and excite them, and working with their employers to develop career paths that enable them to stay as productive as possible.

- **Career disappointment.**

For some, the roles they play and the impact of their work fail to measure up to their youthful ideals and ambitions. Volunteering and contributing to society outside work can often provide the fulfillment, some find, missing from their careers.

➤ **You have argued that, "Companies are ill-prepared to manage middlecence because it is so pervasive, largely invisible, and cul-**

turally uncharted. Employers view these people as solid corporate citizens... That neglect is bad for business". Why companies' ill-preparedness to handle middlescents is bad for business?

Everyday that an employee is less than fully engaged in the work and goals of the enterprise, energy and focus and contribution are left on the table – productivity is lost and never to be recovered. Relatively straightforward changes – a fresh and challenging assignment, rotation to a different part of the organization, extra or specialized training, an in-house career switch, or a sabbatical – can quickly turn an unfocused employee into a reenergized one. Such changes benefit more than the employees and their individual productivity. The organization also benefits because the employee is better positioned to share experience and innovate in the new role.

Longer term, your company will need these workers – and may want some to work past retirement age. Alleviating shortages and preventing a brain drain are not a matter of enticing just one generation of older workers to continue contributing; rather, working (at least part-time) past retirement age will most likely soon become the norm.

Therefore, rekindling the careers of midcareer workers is simultaneously a short-term and a long-term play. The same career changes and management actions to reenergize employees today also increase their effectiveness, commitment, and loyalty down the road. It's a win-win arrangement: win now with greater productivity and innovation; win later with better retention of employees with important skill and experience. Or a lose-lose, if too many employees remain frustrated in their careers, gradually disengage, and merely count the days until retirement.

➤ Who are the disaffected people who stay back and why is it that they are bad for business?

As discussed above, loss of productivity among burned-out, disaffected midcareer workers can be an even greater problem than turnover. Companies which do not appropriately motivate and meet the needs of

midcareer workers will often pay the price with reduced energy, enthusiasm, innovation, and focus. Moreover, though turnover and retention problems are relatively easy to measure, declining productivity and innovation can be harder to identify but lead to long-term severe problems – particularly since many midcareer workers are in positions of significant responsibility and leadership.

➤ What proactive steps do you suggest for the companies to address the imminent middlescents? Are there any best practices/ best companies in this regard?

I recommend three tactics for organizations to help refresh, reengage and unlock more of the potential of midcareer workers:

- **Rekindle careers.**

There are a variety of ways to rejuvenate people and their careers, engendering a fresh sense of accomplishment and renewed loyalty and commitment to the organization. These include fresh assignments or career switches, mentoring or knowledge-sharing roles, additional training and development, and sabbaticals. Change of pace, the opportunity to learn, and the opportunity to apply what's already known in new ways can all reengage midcareer employees, rekindle their ambition, and rejuvenate their careers. Part of this initiative involves the creation of a culture of continued learning. Dow Chemical, for example, has developed an explicit companywide expectation that employees at all levels will continue to learn and grow, seek out new roles and development opportunities, and ready themselves for their "next career" moves. Companies can also create processes that empower midcareer workers to explore engaging new opportunities. At Duke Power, employees can post their jobs in search of swaps with others of equal grade level. At Lands'End, employees can request two week trial transfers to other departments and then finalize to switch if all goes well.

- **Recruit reentrants.**

Organizations can capitalize on the opportunity to recruit skilled and experienced midcareer employees, including people returning to the workforce (for example, women returning after raising families), people changing careers, and people displaced by other organizations' restructurings. These people are often highly capable and eager, but they may not have the recent relevant track record that dominates most hiring decisions. Organizations hire young workers primarily on the basis of capability and potential more than immediate experience. They should be open to hiring people of all ages on that basis. Many organizations may find a substantial untapped workforce pool by targeting midcareer workers. For example, ARO, Inc., a business process outsourcer based in Kansas City, Missouri, struggled to recruiting talented staff for its calling centers. Consequently, ARO upgraded the technology needed to accommodate virtual workers, then set about recruiting. The target: baby boomers, who represent a large potential pool of workers and bring desired characteristics. "Boomers are mature, experienced, and comfortable making decisions on the phone," says Amigoni. "ARO has clients in the insurance, financial services, and medical sectors, and a lot of the people we talk to are older. It helps that the people making the calls on financial services products are older, because they are in similar circumstances to the customers."

- **Expand leadership development.** Despite the size of the boomer cohort and the number of midcareer employees eager to fill the relatively scarce promotion slots available, many large organizations find their leadership 'bench strength' surprisingly thin because their leadership development pipelines have gotten leaky. Companies can take the opportunity to refill the pipeline with midcareer as well as young high potentials, and to recognize late-bloomer candidates for

leadership. They can also extend leadership development experiences to people who will be leaders within their organizations or functions, but are not necessarily on a path to the executive suite. For example, RBC Financial Group felt it needed to develop the next group of leaders to run the fast-growing group of banks and financial services companies. They recognized a capability gap between the current executive team and the leaders to follow. So they created teams of current leaders and "next-generation leaders." Through direct experience sharing and involvement in decision making, the next-generation leaders learned both specific techniques and the core leadership values of RBC while simultaneously participating in the development of new strategy. Highly respected current leaders communicated these leadership values by telling real RBC 'stories' that describe chaotic business situations, decision making, uncertainty, social interaction, and the like. The future leaders learned to implement strategy by sharing experience of real struggles of making decisions while maintaining values, trust, and fairness. Future leaders created development action plans and are mentored by their current-leader coaches.

- **For midcareer men and women to convert their restlessness into fresh energy, what preliminary steps should be taken to prepare the ground?**

There are two preliminary steps to 'prepare the ground' for midcareer workers. First, organizations need to eliminate barriers to career mobility, such as time requirements between job changes, under-the-table recruiting for positions, lack of investment in training for employees over a certain age, and stigma or negative perceptions of role changes, career redirections, new training, lateral moves, and flexible work arrangements.

Second, identify the most valuable middlecent workers. Go beyond the 'stars' to identify the next level of valu-

able workers: the B players, solid contributors whose skills and experience you need to retain. Once you've identified them, pay special attention not only to their potential, performance, and progress but also to any warning signs of middlecent disillusionment and stagnation.

- **You have suggested six strategies for revitalizing careers. Can you share with us what those six strategies are and the companies best known for implementing each or all of them?**

In our study we interviewed leading companies nationwide to identify top strategies for engaging and motivating midcareer workers. These include:

- **Fresh assignments.**
A fresh assignment, often in a different geographical location or part of the organization, lets you take advantage of a person's existing skills, experience, and contacts while letting him or her develop new ones. The best assignments are often lateral moves that mix roughly equal parts old and new responsibilities. Principal Financial Group routinely chooses empty nesters for relocation, particularly those moves that would be difficult for employees with young and growing families. So does GE, which also taps experienced managers to integrate new acquisitions – an ideal way to offer an employee a change of scene and bring to bear a career's worth of organizational know-how.
- **Career changes.**
Middlecents often dream of – and in some cases end up pursuing – something fundamentally new. Yet jumping the corporate ship is risky, so an employer that can offer an attractive internal career change has a chance to retain valuable talent. An employee may develop a new specialty, assume an altogether different job, or sometimes return from a management track to an individual contributor roll.
- **Mentoring colleagues.**
Putting experienced employees into mentoring, teaching, and other knowledge-sharing roles has the dual benefit of reengaging the

midcareer worker and boosting the expertise and organizational know-how of less-experienced employees. For middlecents, serving as a mentor is a personally fulfilling way to share a lifetime of experience, give back to the organization, and make a fresh set of social connections in the workplace. Mentor relationships are often stereotyped as one-way transfers from old to young for the purposes of youthful personal development and career advancement. In fact, they should be viewed as a two-way pairing of knowledge to gain with knowledge to share. That's how mentoring works at Intel, where the partner may outrank the mentor. The program began in a chip-making factory in New Mexico in 1997, when Intel was growing, and many of the factory's managers and technical experts were being transferred to new locations. New experts needed to be developed in a variety of fields. So the factory's top managers started matching partners with mentors who had the needed skills and knowledge. Today, a companywide employee database, which tracks skills attained and desired, helps match partners with mentors, who (thanks to the Internet) may be in another country. Both mentor and partner take a class to learn some guidelines what to talk about, how to maximize the mutual benefit of their relationship and then they set the details of that relationship in a contract that specifies goals and deadlines.

- **Fresh training.**
Corporate training today is disproportionately aimed at the young (especially new employees who need to learn the basics) and at the high potentials. The tacit assumptions are that midcareer people have been trained already, and what little additional training they might need they get on the job. These assumptions are, at best, only partly true. Many of today's midcareer workers are well educated and have retained their love of learning. They know that in-

creasing their skills will raise their chances for personal and professional advancement. However, many find themselves too busy for extensive education and training; personal development time comes at the sacrifice of other responsibilities, both on the job and off. And some people, especially those who have reached positions of authority, stop seeking development opportunities because they hesitate to take risks or don't want to admit that they have things to learn. Meanwhile, too many organizations foster a silent conspiracy against education: They cut the training and development budget first in lean times. They stand silent when managers discourage employees from seeking training on the grounds that it will interfere with getting the work done. And

cians. After years on the line, such employees literally know the products inside and out, and probably want a change of work. And the UK's National Health Service is responding to chronic nursing shortages by training aides to become nurses – a shift to a very different career path.

- **Sabbaticals.**

One of the best ways to rejuvenate, personally and professionally, is simply to get away from the routine of the job for a significant amount of time. A common feature of academic employment relationships, sabbaticals remain rare and underused in the business world. In 2001, Hewitt Associates surveyed more than 500 organizations in the US and found that just 5 offered sabbaticals, either paid or unpaid. Yet a survey the same year

are eligible for an eight-week sabbatical, with full pay, after every seven years of full-time service. Silicon Graphics' regular full-time employees in the US and Canada can take six weeks paid time off after four years. Adobe Systems offers three paid weeks off after every five years of service. Arrow Electronics offers up to ten weeks after seven years, Hallmark Cards uses sabbaticals not only to get people out of the routine of work but also to place them into enlightening settings with the goal of recharging their artistic talent. They might spend time at the company's innovation center; go on "creative research travel" to museums, conferences, inspiring locales, or places where they can study customers and social trends; or simply spend time at the company's 172-acre farm. Wells Fargo's Volunteer Leave program, more than 20 years in operation, offers employees with at least five years' service and a qualifying performance rating the opportunity to work in a community service setting of their choosing for up to four months in a calendar year while receiving full pay and benefits. For its part, the company reaps benefits on several fronts, including good publicity both within the corporation and out in the communities where participants are serving. The most important benefit of course, is a returning employee who is highly energized and recommitted to the organization.

- **Expanding leadership development.**

Many of the executives we spoke within our research cited shortages in their leadership succession pipelines. On the face of it, this is surprising because, in terms of raw numbers, there are plenty of midcareer workers eager to move up the ladder and fill senior management slots. But corporate restructuring and flattening organizations have eroded the old career paths and people can't accumulate the needed set of leadership skills on the job. The situation is sadly

Many find themselves too busy for extensive education and training; personal development time comes at the sacrifice of other responsibilities, both on the job and off

they fail to require managers to set career development plans for all their employees. As a result, many midcareer workers are overdue for a serious infusion of training – which can include refresher courses, in-depth education to develop new skills, and brief introductions to new ideas or areas of business that expand their perspectives and trigger their interest in learning more. Fresh training is, of course, often integral to career changes as well as to employee retention. Lincoln Electric's Leopard Program, for instance, was designed explicitly to enable employees to "change their spots" When patterns of demand for steel fabrication products changed, the company trained dozens of factory and clerical staff volunteers to become assistant salespeople. In some Japanese manufacturers' assembly-line workers regularly train to become product service techni-

by Principal Financial Group found that more than 50% of employees say they long for a sabbatical but feel they can't take one because of financial concerns or employer discouragement. Employers' reluctance centers on cost and, for key employees, potential disruption to business operations. Employees' reluctance comes from fear that taking a leave will somehow mark them as less committed than those who don't interrupt their work. This perception is unfortunate because people tend to return from sabbaticals more committed than ever. They've had a chance to recharge, to do something different, and they're appreciative of their companies for giving them the opportunity. There are organizations that get it – that know that the cost of replacing a middlescent worker in need of a break may far outweigh the cost of the paid time off. Intel employees

ironic – midcareer managers are frustrated by the lack of promotion opportunities and corporate executives are concerned with a lack of candidates with the right experience. The solution is to widen access to leadership development programs to both rejuvenate midcareer managers and refill the leadership pipeline. Participation in leadership development programs is a form of recognition of an employee's value and potential, and workers graduate from them with a renewed commitment to the organization's goals. But in many companies, it's difficult for people not already recognized as high potentials to get in line for these opportunities. We strongly recommended admitting late bloomers, making it easier for midcareer employees to take advantage of these programs. Independence Blue Cross has put one-third of its top 600 people, most of them midcareer employees, through a leadership program focused on individual development and learning by doing. It includes a weeklong session at the Wharton School, individual coaching and career development planning, and work on an important business project. The insurer is now thinking about creating a graduate course for people who have already been through the program. The company is also trying to maintain career momentum after the program through a broader approach to succession planning and by finding its graduates assignments that enable them to move around the business more.

- **For avoiding midcareer crisis, you have advocated 10 questions that every company should ask. Can you please tell us the 10 questions and the implications thereof?**

To understand and encourage career rejuvenation among midcareer workers, we recommend organizations answer these ten questions:

1. Who are your keepers? Besides those on the leadership track, who have the skills, experiences, attitude, and adaptability you need

2. How many of your midcareer employees need to rejuvenate some of their skills or careers?
3. Are you employing any methods to rejuvenate midcareer workers? Which work best?
4. How freely does experience, knowledge, and talent flow in your company? Can employees move around the organization? What's clogging the arteries?
5. How consistently do you make each job assignment work not only for overall business performance but also for individual employee growth?
6. Do you tap people for fresh assignments when their personal circumstances change (for example, when their children grow up and leave home)?
7. Do you encourage employees to change careers within your organization?
8. Do you offer sabbaticals?
9. How often do you hire midcareer people, including workforce reentrants?
10. Do you know which jobs are particularly suited to midcareer candidates? For which jobs do you avoid hiring or assigning them? What implicit biases are holding you back?

- **From your research or consulting experience, did you find any perceptible difference between men middlescents and women middlescents? Who do you think can manage middlecence better and why?**

Our research indicates that midcareer transitions may be more challenging for women than for men. Women are more likely than men to feel stretched between middlecent career and family responsibilities. In addition, many women who took time off to raise a family may feel they don't have the opportunities that male middlescents have at this point in their careers. Female middlescents are more likely to feel burned out, and to say they are at a dead end in their careers. And they often feel overlooked by their employers: they are less likely than male middlescents to feel that they have opportunities to try new things and

work on exciting projects.

- **What is the role of B-schools in preparing the students for the eventual middlecence road-blocks?**

Business schools, I believe, can play a far more powerful role in imparting career management skills that help students achieve successful and fulfilling work throughout their lives. What are the secrets of success in our long-term careers? What is the best way to navigate the corporate environment in midcareer? What are great examples of people who have achieved success in midcareer? What lessons can they offer? Curricula that help address these issues will offer lifelong benefits.

In addition, business schools can play a vital role in teaching tomorrow's executives the best practices and skills to better understand and leverage an increasingly diverse and multi-generational workforce. With unprecedented global population aging, the era of ever-increasing numbers of young workers has come to an end. To succeed in the decades ahead, corporate leaders must become far more effective in empowering and motivating all generations of workers.

Finally, I believe the model of business school as an institution only for young people is short-sighted and, perhaps, soon to be obsolete. Executive programs for midcareer and older workers seeking to reenergize their careers are becoming increasingly common. As I mentioned earlier, leading companies like Blue Cross are partnering with top business schools to create formal programs tailored to their best employees. In the future, I think we will see growing numbers of business schools programs and courses targeted to the different stages of our careers that empower us to be as innovative, energized, and productive as possible. ✦

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