

BusinessWeek

JULY 26, 2004

www.businessweek.com

Personal Business Retirement Guide

Q&A

The Golden Years? Try Go-Go Years

A talk with retirement guru Ken Dychtwald

PEOPLE USED TO WORK for 40 years, then abruptly head out to pasture. Today retirement is a more active pursuit, combining work, self-improvement, and fun, says Ken Dychtwald, co-founder of Age Wave, a San Francisco research firm that focuses on the graying workforce. Dychtwald, 54, is a gerontologist and author of 10 books on aging-related issues. Associate Editor Toddi Gutner caught up with him by phone to explore his views on the new definition of retirement.

How has retirement evolved?

At the beginning of the 20th century there was essentially no retirement. People worked until they died, and they thought it was a good thing. In the 1930s, the Depression saw 25% of the labor force out of work. President Roosevelt decided to make room for the younger generation and created the retirement age of 65.

Retirement over the next several decades meant a short pause before death. But life expectancy increased, the quality of life for retirees improved, and financial well-being rose. In the 1980s and '90s, retirement became an extended period of leisure that was promoted as something infinitely desirable, and something we were all entitled to.

Where are we now?

Today's retirees are social guinea pigs. We're shifting away from the model of

learning for 20 years, working like a mad dog for 40, and goofing around for 20. What is evolving is some new blend between learning, working, and leisure.

Retirees are saying: "Just because I'm older doesn't mean I don't have dreams." Take John Glenn Jr., who at 77 went back into space. Or Jack McKeon, the 72-year-old coach, who was called out of retirement and catapulted the Florida Marlins to a World Series victory.

What is "middlescence," as you put it in your book *Age Power*?

It is the period between your 50s and 70s when you have to find a new identity. While disorienting and confusing, there is tremendous opportunity. Rather than winding down, retirees are reinventing themselves. Rather than wandering off to society's sidelines, they're having fun and embarking on new careers. It's not the



end of life but really just the third quarter.

How can business develop a mutually beneficial relationship with the growing ranks of middlesecent?

There are a lot of similarities between the women's movement and the age of middlesecent. In both situations, companies need to design jobs that make it more attractive to stay than to leave. A lot of talent and experience gets shoved out the door. There are also many obstacles in pension and benefits regulation that make it difficult to continue to employ those in middlesecent who may prefer more flexible or part-time arrangements. Changes in these policies will be good for business, people, and the economy. ■

BusinessWeek online For an extended interview with Dychtwald go to businessweek.com/magazine/extra.htm