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## 7: Work may add MEANING to your later life

By Marianne Lavelle  
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Financial concerns may be the first reasons older workers offer to explain why they're staying on the job, but researchers have found that one deeper reason--the need to make a meaningful contribution--is often the more important motivating factor.

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"At a certain time of life--call it midlife--you look beyond just making a living for yourself and your family to thinking about what your contribution is or could be," says Marika Stone, co-author, with her husband, Howard, of *Too Young to Retire*. He speaks and gives courses on the concept of pursuing a "renaissance" rather than a retirement, while she promotes the idea on their website, *2young2retire.com*, and in her work as a yoga instructor. "I've come to believe it's hard-wired into us as human beings--this ancient turning inward," she says.

**Productivity.** AARP indeed found that intangibles were key in its 2003 survey showing that 79 percent of baby boomers plan never to retire. Money and healthcare were cited most often as the primary factors in their thinking, but when the respondents were asked to give reasons without ranking them, they were far more likely to mention the wish to stay mentally or physically active or other aspirations. Seventy-seven percent cited the desire to be productive or useful.

History, of course, is replete with examples of people who have achieved great milestones in their later years: Benjamin Franklin's invention of bifocal lenses at the age of 78, Giuseppe Verdi's composition of "Ave Maria" at 85, and Frank Lloyd Wright's work on the design of the Guggenheim Museum at the time of his death at 91.

You don't have to be one of history's great geniuses to contribute. Benefits consulting firm Towers Perrin found that, in contrast to the conventional view of the young go-getter, workers over the age of 50 actually are more engaged in the workplace than their junior peers in terms of time, dedication, and energy.

"When you go beyond the financial aspects, you see the issues of wanting to feel connected to the workplace and that there's still a lot more to be offered in skill, knowledge, and expertise," says Deborah Russell, director of economic security at AARP.

**Selflessness.** In a *Chronicle of Philanthropy* essay last fall, two nonprofit activists noted that current advertising campaigns by the financial services industry, focusing on retirement years as a time to contribute to society, were based on extensive

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marketing research on the "deep yearning for work that not only is personally meaningful but also means something beyond the self." The authors were Marc Freedman, president of Civic Ventures in San Francisco, which works on engaging older Americans in community service, and John Gomperts, who heads Experience Corps, a national service program for Americans older than 55.

Although many seniors choose volunteerism--from serving as aides in hospitals or libraries to tutoring youngsters in public schools--for others, the idea of building upon their lifetime of work experience, or stretching it out in new ways, has an irresistible appeal. Perhaps, experts say, that's because the idea of "meaningful work" had its genesis in the baby boomers' coming of age in the 1960s and is one they plan to take with them into their retirement years.

That's why Howard and Marika Stone, who themselves made the transition from advertising and public-relations careers into "unretirement gurus" in their later years, say it's important for older workers to evaluate what really brings them meaning as they decide to continue working.

✓ They point to stories like that of Richard Haid of Hamilton, Ohio, who had been the chief executive of a family-owned business for 20 years when he found himself seeking out new meaning. "The question that kept coming up was, is there something more in my life in which I could use the unique gifts that I suspected I had?" he says. He now serves as an adult mentor, leading workshops and presentations for business and professional conferences on how others--many of them business owners and executives as he was--can improve their performance and enhance the quality of their lives.

"People get into depressions, with a big-time loss of identity, at this time of life," says Howard Stone. "It's important to start thinking about this before you hit the wall. We try to get people to wake up to the possibilities, the advantages of aging."

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