



Carol Kleiman

Old view of retirement not working

Published April 1, 2004

Roger E. Herman, CEO of The Herman Group, a management consulting firm based in Greensboro, N.C., is 60, the age when U.S. workers traditionally start planning their retirement. But not Herman--and it's all the more surprising because he's usually looking ahead.

Herman is a futurist specializing in workforce and workplace trends. And he says he is not alone in his reluctance to leave the world of work.

"I'm not thinking about retirement because I'm having too much fun and feel I'm making a difference by helping others do what they need to do," said Herman, who has a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's in public administration.

He has been in consulting since 1980 and has a staff of 10.

"For the past couple of generations, retirement has been the goal of most workers," added Herman, co-author of "Impending Crisis: Too many jobs, too few people" (Oakhill Press). "But it's also been a little bit scary with its connotations of getting a gold watch, sitting on the front porch and waiting for the Grim Reaper. Today, retirement as we have known it is evaporating. It's gone. Instead, people are going to continue to work full time and part time, to job-share and to do contract work."

The futurist has present-day data to back up his observations.

"In January of 2004, there were 4,864,000 people over the age of 65 working or seeking work, and 95.7 percent of them were still working, according to the U.S. Department of Labor," Herman said. "And 309,000 still working were over the age of 80."

Why are workers increasingly delaying retirement? Herman says it's based on a need for income in addition to pensions and Social Security, for health benefits, and--more than anything--the need to be productive.

"When they were growing up, people age 65 and over were taught that you must not be a parasite on society, that you must be independent and take care of yourself," he noted.

And the mounting presence of people over 65 in the paid labor market--particularly as the millions of Baby Boomers reach retirement age--is going to have a direct impact on the job market. I hopefully asked Herman if he thinks that age discrimination might become less rampant.

"As the labor market tightens, employers will be more receptive to employment of older workers,

who still have talent, wisdom, maturity, stability and make excellent workers," the consultant said.

When that day arrives--and the futurist isn't predicting when it will--"we'll see a lot of creativity in how employers collaborate with older and experienced workers to get the work done," Herman said.

What they will do, he says, is adopt flexible work arrangements, provide training to update skills, train managers to work with older workers, encourage team building, provide more opportunities for temporary and part-time work and implement phased retirement.

"Retirement as we have known it is old thinking," Herman asserted.

And he is not the only one who thinks that: "With Americans living longer, healthier lives, the conventional idea of retirement is obsolete and millions of Americans are working past the age of 65, not because they have to but because they want to," according to Marika and Howard Stone, authors of the forthcoming book, "Too Young to Retire: 101 ways to start the rest of your life" (Plume). They're also co-founders of www.2young2retire.com.

Carol Kleiman's columns also appear in Monday's and Tuesday's Business sections. Hear her on WBBM Newsradio 780 at 6:21 p.m. and 10:22 p.m. Mondays and 11:20 a.m. Saturdays. Watch her "Career Coach" segments on CLTV. E-mail ckleiman@tribune.com.