
All Signs Point to an Aging Work Force

By Editor Test *Wed, Sep 9, 2009*

Nearly four-in-ten adults who have worked past the median retirement age of 62 told Pew Research that they delayed their retirement “because of current economic conditions.”

Whether or not the American work force literally gets “grayer” in the years ahead may depend on how many Boomers decide to color their hair.

But a just-released survey, “Recession Turns the Graying Office Grayer,” leaves little doubt that the average age of America’s workers is climbing.

The survey was conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Social and Demographic Trends project. The results are based on about 1,800 interviews in July and August, and on an analysis of Labor Department data.

The trend is no mystery. Boomers are aging, their progeny are staying in school, and the recession is forcing some people—no one knows exactly how many—to delay or contemplate delaying retirement.

People over age 55 now account for 18.7% of the labor force (a new high), while people ages 16 to 24 account for only 14% (a new low). In 2016, those 55+ are expected to make up 22.7% of the workforce.

Since 2000, the percentage of people ages 55 to 64 who are working rose six percent, to 65.3%, while the percentage of people ages 65 and older who work jumped to 17.3% from 13%. Between 2006 and 2016, one-third of the total growth in the labor force is expected to derive from the fact that more older workers are working.

The recession will only accelerate this trend. Nearly four-in-ten adults who have worked past the median retirement age of 62 told Pew’s researchers that they delayed their retirement “because of current economic conditions.”

Sixty-three percent of those ages 50 to 61 think they may delay retirement because of the recession. Women are more nervous about it than men: 72% of women in that age group fear they will have to postpone their retirement plans, compared with 54% of men.

Just over half (51%) of retirees say they wanted to retire when they did. Many people retire involuntarily, the survey confirmed. About a third of retirees stopped working for health or other reasons, while 9% said they were forced out of their jobs. About one in six current retirees—whether they retired voluntarily or not—work full-time or part-time.

Not surprisingly, the happiest retirees are those who stop working voluntarily, the survey showed. They are more than twice as likely (75% vs. 30%) as “reluctant” retirees to be “very satisfied” with their retirement, and only four percent were unhappy with their retirement.

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