



Last week I had a glorious conversation with Elsa, an energetic woman in her early 70s, who is coming out of retirement. Rather than going quietly, she is diving headlong into a new career. ‘If I’m going to live until I’m 90, I don’t want regrets,’ she said. ‘I’ve always loved working, and I’m ready for the next adventure.’

She’s opening another shop – her next project after almost four decades in retail. ‘I know,’ she says, ‘my family tell me I’m mad, but it’s what I know and what I love. After I sold my last shop I tried putting my feet up, but I got so terribly bored! And I missed my lovely customers.’

So, she’s back on her feet, full of excitement and purpose, inspired by the opportunity to serve and connect and be useful.

It’s an increasingly common story, with many Baby Boomers working into their 8th and even 9th decades. In my work with organisations that genuinely want the best for their older workers, I hear story after story of people who, by choice or necessity, continue to go to work each day.

Some tell me that their work family is too important to leave. ‘My kids are overseas and all my friends are through my work. If I retire, who will I have?’

Others say an unexpected late-life mortgage leaves them with no choice. When a relationship fails in your fifties, it’s harder to get back on your feet again. Especially for women.

With Statistics New Zealand telling us that by 2031, one in every five people in our country will be over 65, it’s no surprise that we will need greater numbers of older workers to sustain the working population. The current skills shortages will only increase as Baby Boomers continue to retire. So don’t, because we need you!

Some of you may now be bristling indignantly, that you’ve done your time at work and it’s your turn to play. Yes, and there’s no reason not to do both. The days of gold watches and long retirement are disappearing, and not only because of the cost of sustaining your lifestyle when you live into your

90s and beyond. I admit it has always amused me that gold watches were given as retirement gifts, at the very point of life when time no longer mattered. Apparently the practice traces back to the 1940s, when American company Pepsi gave retiring employees a gold watch, with the line ‘You gave us your time, now we’ll give you ours.’

With better health and longer life, the traditional retirement age is no longer relevant. When my parents retired from farming, it was common for farmers to move into town and pass away within a few years. Retirement at 65 when you only had a few years left was reasonable. Now, though, if women get to 65, there’s an 80% chance that they will live until 94, and similarly men who get to 65 could well get to 90. In good health and with plenty of energy, wisdom and experience to offer, why wouldn’t you want to stay involved and contributing?

I think the key will be in the response of age smart employers, who recognise that Baby Boomers can give them a competitive advantage that could almost be called unfair. Offering flexibility and conditions that suit Boomers’ age and stage, these employers will fast become workplaces of choice as well as attracting customers who recognise themselves in the staff who serve them. Some local hardware franchises and supermarkets are already well down this track. It’s smart win-win business.

The Boomers I speak with who want to keep working, are eager to find employers who will treat them well. They are more than willing to repay with loyalty, hard work and enthusiasm. Elsa is heading back into self-employment in her new shop, but she’s already on the lookout for older, like-minded assistants who share her passion for retail. Far more than a job, it’s a repeat performance on a stage that she loves. Encore!

Jenny Magee works with Boomers to make the most of the second half of their lives. Her latest book **A Bold Life – How Boomer Women are Reinventing Life Beyond Fifty** is available at good bookstores or from www.jennymagee.com If you are looking to make significant changes, contact Jenny via email to jenny@jennymagee.com

