Too Old to Get a Gig? Not!

Insights
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When my third child was born, like many other young mothers, I considered how to stay connected professionally, how to maintain my standard of living, and how to balance the joy of parenting with the fulfillment of a career. In those days, I hadn't heard of the gig economy, but I certainly dreamed of something like it. I wanted to work on my own terms that matched my new family's schedule. I could demand my own price and take care of my own savings plans, I thought.

But as a person on the tail end of the baby boomer generation, I fell into a familiar pattern. I was making a good salary and had traditional benefits. How could I take such a risk when I had a sure thing? Instead, I hunkered down with my golden handcuffs, back to work after a six-week hiatus, juggling day care and executive meetings, dinner and project timelines, all in the same day, week after week.

Now that the kids are teens and my career survived, I see retirement on the horizon. As my colleague Lisa McGlynn noted in her recent blog about millennials in the gig economy, the concept is appealing for "workers past retirement age who have already raised their families but would still like to boost their incomes." For me, I can't imagine not working, but instead see that a gig here and there on my own terms would be quite appealing.

The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) are getting in on the action too, making it a priority to force-feed resourceful employers into employment relationships beyond what was comprehended by them and their gig workers. See Travis Vance's blog on DOL steps in misclassification and the article by Fisher Phillips Partner Ed Harold featured in Biz New Orleans, describing the NLRB's efforts to change the status of temporary employees.

I don't disagree with federal agencies getting into this arena since more than 50 million workers entered the gig workforce in 2015 according to this infographic by Jeff Desjardins. The problem with agency involvement is the lack of understanding about what Americans want today. We want what we want now, on demand, and on our own terms, not terms forced upon us by a paternalistic government. Agencies like the USDOL and NLRB need to wake up and consider models of income stability and security that fit the entrepreneurial spirit that drives Americans such as portable benefits like those discussed in our blog last week by Danielle Garcia.

Millennials, scoot over. Baby boomers are interested in gigs too!

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