

Living Longer, Working Longer

A group of retired British executives finally got what they had wanted for years: no meetings, no deadlines, no boss. But within a year, they were bored out of their minds. So they did something surprising for people in their seventies. They went back to work. Today, they give advice to small companies and startups for a few hours a day. They only charge what each business can afford. Sometimes they simply ask the company to give money to charity later. They have one rule: no heavy lifting. For them, work is not about money. It is the cure for the boredom that golf and gardening could not fix.

But for most people who go back to work, the story is different.

In the United States, about one in five people over sixty-five is now working or looking for a job. That is twice as many as a generation ago. When researchers ask why, the answer is usually not boredom. It is money. Life is getting more expensive, and people are living longer. The money they saved is often not enough. Finding a job again is not easy, either. Many older people face age discrimination. And when older workers lose a job, they stay unemployed much longer than younger people.

Korea shows this problem most clearly.

Korean workers usually leave their main jobs around the age of fifty-three. But most of them want to keep working until their early seventies. The reason is simple: the national pension is too small. The average payment is less than half of what one person needs each month for basic living costs.

So older Koreans keep working. More than a third of Koreans over sixty-five still have a job. That is the highest rate among rich countries. In most rich countries, only about one in seven people that age still works. Many older Koreans take temporary jobs with lower pay. And the problem is growing. More than 20 percent of Koreans are already over sixty-five, and that number will nearly double by 2050.

There is a bigger reason behind all of this.

Retirement is actually a new idea, only about a hundred years old. It was created for a world where people died a few years after they stopped working. That world is gone. People are living much longer than before. In the past, people worked for about forty years and rested for maybe fifteen or twenty. Today, a healthy person can live thirty years or more after retirement. That is a long time to live without a salary. Prices go up, and medical costs grow. Financial experts now tell people to prepare for a life that might last until ninety-five. Not because they expect it, but because it is possible.

Something strange is also happening with young people.

While older workers cannot afford to stop, some young people are so burned out that they want to quit before their careers have really started. In Malaysia, there is a "retirement home" for people in their twenties. Tired young workers can stay there for a few hundred dollars a month. It is fully booked. But their escape will probably not last. Many young people today will live to one hundred. Sooner or later, they will have to go back to work too.

All these stories are really one story. For a lucky few, going back to work is a choice. For most people, it is about survival. Either way, the old idea of retirement is disappearing. In the future, retirement will not be a finish line that you cross one time. It will be a door. You walk through it, come back out, and open it again, for as long as your body and your money allow.

- 1) At what age would you like to retire?
- 2) What would you like to do after you stop working?
- 3) Do you know anyone who went back to work after retiring?
- 4) How do the older people in your family spend their time after they stop working?
- 5) Have you ever felt bored during a long holiday?
- 6) Would you keep working if you did not need the money?
- 7) Do people need a job to feel useful?
- 8) Do you think Korea's national pension will be enough for you when you are old?
- 9) Since people are living longer than before, what should the retirement age be?
- 10) What does this say about the work culture when older people cannot stop working but young people want to stop working early?

Bored out of one's mind	(exp)	extremely bored	The movie was so slow that I was bored out of my mind after twenty minutes.
Give advice	(exp)	to tell someone what you think they should do	My grandfather loves to give advice about saving money.
Afford	(v)	to have enough money to pay for something	We cannot afford a new car this year, so we will keep our old one.
Charity	(n)	an organization that collects money to help people who need it	She gives part of her salary to a charity that helps sick children.
Heavy lifting	(exp)	the hardest or most difficult part of a job	Our team leader does most of the heavy lifting when we have a big project.
Cure	(n)	something that ends a problem or illness	Doctors are still looking for a cure for the common cold.
Face	(v)	to have to deal with a difficult problem or situation	Many small shops face serious problems when a big supermarket opens nearby.
Living costs	(n)	the money you need for basic things like food, housing, and transportation	Living costs in big cities are much higher than in small towns.

Burned out	(adj)	so tired from too much work that you cannot continue	After working every weekend for a year, he felt completely burned out.
Sooner or later	(exp)	at some time in the future, even if you do not know exactly when	If you keep driving so fast, sooner or later you will have an accident.
Survival	(n)	the state of continuing to live or exist, especially in a difficult situation	For many small restaurants, the first year is a fight for survival.
Finish line	(n)	the line that marks the end of a race; often used to talk about the end of a long process	After four years of study, she could finally see the finish line.

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