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Issue Editor:
Bruce Frankel

Series Editor: Bruce Frankel
Production Editor: Jim Montalto

LPN-Q, The Quarterly Journal of the Life Planning Network is produced by members of the Life Planning Network, a community of professionals from diverse disciplines dedicated to helping people navigate the second half of life.

The Life Planning Network is the leading association supporting professionals who assist people at this life stage. We intend to bring into everyday use proactive and purposeful planning for the second half of life. Learn more at lifeplanningnetwork.org.

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Catalyzing Cross-generational Experience

A global economic imperative

Elizabeth Isele

Across the world, individuals, companies and governments are struggling to address the challenges of what to do with an unprecedented demographic surge created by an additional 20-30 years of longevity. People aged 50+ are asking what they will do to optimize their extended lives with this windfall? Companies are urgently asking how they can stop "brain drain," the flight of experienced talent from their workforce, while governments despair that a demographic tsunami is bankrupting their social benefits programs.

A statistical snapshot makes the "brain drain" easy to grasp. Baby boomers make up 31% of the current U.S. workforce and 56% hold leadership positions. But boomers are retiring at a rate of 10,000 every day. By 2029, all baby boomers will be over 65. The loss of them as workers and leaders is expected to hit knowledge industries—education, petro chemical, finance, federal government and engineering—particularly hard.

For the past four years, I've been crisscrossing the globe from Australia to Chile to Dublin to Istanbul convening cross-sector forums designed to raise awareness among business, academic and government leaders of the value of catalyzing cross-generational experience to increase engagement and productivity and activating next steps in the workplace and new business startups. The forums highlight a public/private/academic collaborative approach, as opposed to churning through the same tired ideas within silos.

Our "Ideas in Motion" are facilitated learning forums driven by creativity and resourcefulness. They are aimed at fueling out-of-the-box thinking targeting the ways business and governments can best harness the largest untapped talent pool in the history of humankind and build an "Experienced Economy."

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As a society we have diminished the value of experience and perpetrated a brain drain the scope of which is socially and economically devastating. Raising awareness of and creating programs to unleash experience across generations represents an unprecedented opportunity, and its potential social and economic impact is huge.

It's a win-win for individuals 50+ seeking to optimize their extended lives and for employers who are trying to stem the brain drain created by a retiring workforce—and reckon with young employees hired to offset the loss of mature workers, but who do not have the skills inherent in experience. The 50+ have knowledge that millennials, gen-x, etc. need, and vice versa, when it comes to business and entrepreneurship. Youth have specially focused knowledge and 50+ have collective knowledge about the culture and dynamic of work. In our AI, data-driven, IOT world, we need ways to humanize the technology: the 50+ bring analyzing skills honed throughout their life and work, superior interpersonal communication skills, vast networks of resources, insights and expertise—and deeply rooted ethics.

This is not just wishful thinking. Data demonstrates that catalyzing the aggregated experience in participants of all ages boosts workplace engagement, productivity and profitability and accelerates successful new business startups.

A 2009 study by McDonald's of their franchises in the United Kingdom demonstrated that those franchises with multi-generational workforces increased productivity over those without multi-generational workforces by 20%.¹

A 2012 research report in Australia found that an increase of just 7% of people 55+ in the workplace would increase Australia's GDP by \$25 billion in 2022.²

Another report from the UK found that, if the employment rate of 50-64 year-olds matched that of the 35-49 age group, the UK economy would be boosted by £88bn (about \$111 billion U.S.).³

As impressive as that data is, I think it's of even more value to put a human face on the statistics. Today, we're seeing as many as five generations in the workforce. Here are three examples of how the skills, experiences and different perspectives of older adults are being brought into and influencing businesses:

Building an intergenerational business after being anointed "Star Baker" in the Great British Bake Off.

Marie Campbell is a Scottish grandmother who was propelled to business success by her daughter, Catriona Campbell, Founding Director of Seren (<http://www.ey-seren.com/>)

It did not hurt that Catroina, a digital guru, was one of the first inductees into the UK Digital Hall of Fame. She was also one of the top 100 individuals recognized by Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, for contributions to the development of the Internet.

Catriona sensed there was a larger market than just family and friends for her Mum's cakes. So she submitted Marie's name and baking credentials to the Great British Bake-Off, the wildly successful reality TV series where passionate amateur baking fans compete to be crowned the UK's Best Amateur Baker. The series follows the trials and tribulations of competitors of all ages, from every background and every corner of Britain, as they attempt to prove their baking prowess.



Marie was selected from 36,000 applicants and, at age 66, she was the oldest contestant, to date. In one episode, Marie achieved the coveted "Star Baker" award. Although later bumped off the show after an episode when her biscuits went bust, Marie was an audience favorite. She was also well-loved by the other contestants for whom she quickly became a mentor. Marie was in it for the fun and experience, and the younger bakers learned a lot about how to cope with the stress of the competition from her. Even when her biscuit failure led to her Bake-Off demise, she was able to laugh at her mistakes and get on with her life. And did she ever "get on" with it!

After her run on the TV show ended, Marie received an avalanche of orders for her cakes. She opened her own bakeshop and hired a young, 24-year old pastry chef from a 2-Star Michelin restaurant to help meet the demand. The intergenerational team's cakes are truly works of art, and their customers include the famous 5-Star Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland.

Today, Marie is expanding her business through e-commerce. Her tech-savvy daughter is helping to build the website, but Marie herself keeps track of the business with three iPads. And, though this began as a two-generational endeavor, it quickly spread to three with her young pastry chef. And now Marie is teaching another generation—her grandsons—the art of baking. She's especially proud of her 5-year old grandson's skills wielding a pastry piping bag. "He's well on his way to becoming a young, master decorator," she says proudly.

Achieving the dream of becoming an engineer—at age 90

Even as a child, Barbara Beskind designed and built things on her own. One of her first creations was a hobbyhorse. By the time she was ready for college, she knew she wanted to be an inventor but she was thwarted. No women were then allowed in the engineering department.

Barbara was stuck in Home Economics—not exactly a hotbed of invention. After graduation from college, she joined the Army and became an occupational therapist. She was retired and living in Silicon Valley when she saw a “60 Minutes” interview of David Kelly, Founder of IDEO.



Photo by Nicolas Zurcher, Courtesy of IDEO

As she listened to him talk about the importance of having diverse staff with different perspectives on a design team, she thought, “that sounds like me.”

IDEO was making products for older adults and, Barbara decided to write and offer her unsolicited advice on the viability of the products they were designing. IDEO got her letter and decided to bring her in for a trial run.

They quickly found her opinions (tested through real-life experience) insightful, pragmatic—and cost-saving. Soon, she—at age 90 in the most ageist work environment in the country—was allowed to create and prototype products of her own. Today, she’s an inspiring role model and mentor to young employees who adore her energy and enthusiasm.

Emerging narrative inspires the leader of prize-winning building organization



While catalyzing cross-generational experience strikes me as common sense and a practical solution to transferring knowledge and skills to boost workplace engagement for all ages, it is not an easy sell. The workplace is rife with barriers such as the traditional old career culture of work until retirement or older workers are too expensive. Creating and supporting a multi-generational workforce requires a new mindset. That’s why I was so encouraged to meet George Minardos, the CEO of Minardos Group, at Vint Cerf’s Innovation for Jobs Summit

(<http://www.i4jsummit.com/>). The Minardos Group is a company that builds design-centered residential and commercial projects.

After my presentation on catalyzing cross-generational experience at the i4J Forum, George came up to me and said, "I work with super talented young designers building 3-D architectural schematics but they haven't a clue of how to actually build something. After listening to you, I realized I need to find a way to connect them with older, experienced construction workers who do."

It was one of those Eureka moments for me: "A business leader actually gets what I have been espousing for years and wants to do something about it!" George and I are now working together to not only bring intergenerational work programming into the Minardos Group, but across the entire trade industries, as well.

The diversity of the intergenerational workplace isn't just a development—it's a creative opportunity. So how do we make it happen?

We have a program model at GIEE designed to be customized and replicated to ignite cross-generational experience locally and globally. Our Experience Incubators® are dynamic, interactive, intergenerational workshops where we catalyze the energy, social media and technology experience of the young with the skills, assets, resources, resilience and networks of older individuals' life-long experience. Francis Bacon said, "Knowledge is power," but we recognize the *dynamic process of learning* as even more powerful.

Our unique curriculum focuses on "unleashing potential" and creates positive action steps. Working collaboratively, attendees have an opportunity to flex their vision, creativity, resourcefulness and influence to fuel out-of-the-box thinking, regarding:

1. ***Introducing the Entrepreneurial Spirit and Mindset*** — Understanding how curiosity drives discovery, and creativity empowers optimism and action to bring an idea to life.
2. ***Understanding the Dimensions of Curiosity*** — Inquisitiveness, Creativity, Risk Tolerance, Openness and how it can ignite your vast experience and knowledge.
3. ***Decoding Your Entrepreneurial History Decade by Decade*** — Building confidence by identifying the ways you have been creating/entrepreneurial all your life.
4. ***Ideating*** — Unleashing your audacity to draw upon your wealth of experience to think out of the box to identify actionable ideas.

Intergenerational initiatives are not a seismic new thought shift. They are consistent with the United Nations' concept of a "society for all ages," (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/resources/international-year-of-older-persons-1999/operational-framework/raising-awareness-the-society-for-all-ages.html>) introduced in the late 1990s as a way for generations to invest in one another and share in the fruits of that investment, guided by the twin principles of reciprocity and equity.

Reciprocity and Equity sounds like a successful win-win to me! The best of relations (personal and business) are built on reciprocity, and strong relationships build social and economic equity. It makes no sense to ignore or retire older workers as if their knowledge and experience had a shelf life, especially when they want to continue working and contributing. This is not just a "nice" way to keep seniors happy and engaged. It is a business and economic imperative. Remember what George Minardos said, "I need to find a way to connect my young super talented designers with older, experienced construction workers who know how to build!"

Perhaps it's time to give grandparents a raise!



Elizabeth Isele is the founder and CEA of the Global Institute for Experienced Entrepreneurship as well as co-founder and CEO of SeniorEntrepreneurshipWorks.org, co-founder of eProvStudio.com, and founder of SavvySeniorsWork.com. She is a senior fellow in Social Innovation at Babson College and a MetLife Journalist in Aging Fellow. She has, for the past four years been crisscrossing the globe convening forums to ignite intergenerational experience and build better workplaces. Her goal is to create an "Experienced Economy" that will boost local, national and global economies.

1. 2009
McDonald's
Study

http://www.efa.org.uk/data/files/news/mcdonalds_later_life_workers_press_release.pdf

2. Source: J. Daley, *Game-Changers: Economic Reform Priorities for Australia*, 2012

3. Source: "The Missing Million," International Longevity Centre 2014

<http://www.bitc.org.uk/news-events/news/%E2%80%98missing-million%E2%80%99-older-workers-could-boost-uk-economy-%C2%A388-billion>