



## FROM CHAPTER 6

### THIRD AGE CAREERS

As people stay healthy and live longer, working past conventional retirement age will become a trend. Myths about the inevitable injurious effects of aging are beginning to collapse as older people show that they can be more rather than less creative, more rather than less capable, more rather than less savvy.

Many people in their sixties and seventies have been developing passions and skills not previously tapped, leading them into totally new careers. Others have redeveloped old careers in new ways. We call these new kinds of careers *third age careers*.

Third age careers often form a key component of a third age life portfolio. The transition from second age to third age requires that people and organizations break comfortable links with each other. Individuals can create entirely new kinds of interconnections with organizations. One way to make new, more flexible connections will be for organizations to encourage individuals to shape third age careers.

*Careers* is not a typo: we see the third age as a time of multiple reinvented careers, at times emerging simultaneously. Some authors have written about the role of

a third age career for retirees, but often only as a way to extend a second age career. A kind of encore.

We do not mean by third age careers simply jumping second age career tracks, or changing disciplines, or down stepping from a management position back to the technical ladder. Neither do we intend for the idea to encompass busywork jobs, volunteer or for pay, that some third agers take to keep from getting bored.

Our notion of third age careers is that third agers can revitalize themselves, the organizations with which they choose to be associated, and their communities by creating a flexible, often shifting work portfolio, a kind of ensemble of careers. Each work endeavor might not be necessarily logically linked to other ventures in the mix.

For individuals to create such a potpourri of careers while still involved in an organization will require formal organizations to embrace them, support (including funding) them, and benefit from them. The key is that any and all activities that are part of third age careers tap into the many dimensions of a person's creativity.

Individuals, professions, and organizations must reexamine how they have come to think of a career. As with many concepts integral to the second age, a career is most commonly thought of as a linear progression. The term suggests rushing ahead, or at least wanting to rush ahead. We speak of a person as climbing the career ladder. Starting at the bottom is considered in conventional wisdom to be a good place to begin. You've got to work your way UP. Career pathing was all the rage in the 1980s.

Many companies have job families called "professional ladders." An Engineer I becomes an Engineer II, an Engineer III, and so on. Fast-rising stars are given special assignments to prepare them for more responsibility "down the road." These hot shots are said to be "on the fast track." Should they stumble, they are spoken of as having "derailed." Soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines aspire to be promoted to the next highest rank.

Ladders, tracks, ranks. In the second age a career is all about getting in line, about getting somewhere else, somewhere down the line. We are not suggesting that

cultivating professional, technical, and managerial talent is not a step-by-step process.  
Of course it is.

But in the third age, sequential, step-by-step advancement must be displaced by simultaneous, multidimensional growth driven by creativity. Ladders, tracks, and ranks must give way to hubs and spokes, to webs, to starbursts.

Copyright 2008 William A. Sadler, Ph.D. and James H. Krefft, Ph.D.

All Rights Reserved

For ordering information go to <http://www.changingcoursebook.com>