

SSCC Career Services:

Am I too old...

- to learn?
- to go back to school?
- to choose another career?

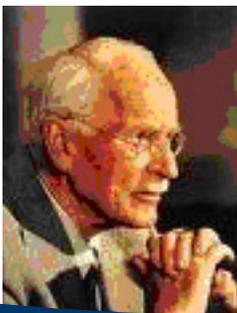
Do these sound familiar? People often come to Career Services because life has forced them to look at circumstances, choices, and the direction of their lives. It may be a plant closing, a divorce, or deep seated feelings of unhappiness or dissatisfaction with one's current job and career. Frequently people are left wondering, "Is this all there is?"

Yet other questions haunt them, causing them to wonder if attending college is the right move - "I am too old."

Barbara Strauch (2010) notes in her book, *The Secret Life of the Grown up Brain: The Surprising Talents of the Middle Aged Mind*, that while some deficits do exist, overall, the brain's ability improves at middle age. Research has found it functions in ways better than that of people in their twenties in its ability to process information faster, solve problems arising at unique solutions, and better at assessing social situations.

Television journalist Bill Moyers will soon retire at 76 years old because his friend Walter Cronkite revealed to him that he mistakenly retired much too early at 65 (Buchholz, 2010). The fact is we are aging differently, living longer, and healthier lives. Most of us will want to work longer and take advantage of the opportunity to choose work that we want and feel really matters, something our grandparents were never afforded. Yes, 50 is the new 40!

Additionally, traditional pension plans were never designed to allow for people to retire at 55 for a 30 year vacation. Such plans are not sustainable. Social security was instituted at a time when the life expectancy was 61 years old. Those who received the benefit in the 1930s were fortunate to receive it for two years prior to dying. (Freedman, 2007).



While our culture mocks mid-life, Carl Jung noted that it is an opportunity for us to "come into our own," finding our place in the world and even our calling. But this requires stepping into "a larger life, risking being who we really are, that is what wants to come to the world through us" as opposed to being held back by fear or the directives of others (Hollis, 2009). Jung himself worked steadily, writing books, speaking, and teaching until his death at 85.

What are your dreams?

Think back to times when you were a child. Where did your mind wander off to? What did you aspire to be? What got you really excited? Do you have those moments yet today when you become lost in your thoughts asking questions such as, “What if...?” What possibilities come to mind? What am I supposed to be doing? versus What would I like to be doing?

“What am I supposed to be doing,” originates from messages received from family, society, religion, gender, “shoulds, and oughts.” But, “What would I like to be doing?” comes from a deeper place stirring within us – the place where dreams come, our personality, temperament, our strengths, our calling, and sense of mission.

Worthy Work

Barbara Sher (1994) describes the difference between a job and work – a job pays the bills and “life’s work feels worth doing.” Simply stated, a life’s work feels meaningful whether it makes money or not. What comes to mind when you think of work that is worth doing or meaningful? It does not have to be something grand or glorious; but what needs done right now in front of you? What comes to your mind when thinking of work that has meaning?

Write down what you or the world calls meaningful work. Jot down the first thing that comes to mind, without analyzing or judging...

- Examples of work
- People who come to mind
- What does meaningful work look like?

Look over your findings.

- What patterns do you notice?
- What are these people like?

When something really matters, you must bring it to life. What matters to you? How can you find the traits identified above in yourself? Which of them are there? It requires both a decision and action on our part. Picasso said, “When I was a child I painted what I was told. But as an old man, I paint what I want.” Too old, really?



Maya Angelou wrote her first book at age 42.



Grandma Moses began painting in her 70s.



John Glenn returned to space at age 77.

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