

GOOD LIVING: FINANCIAL PLANNING FOR THE HEALTHY, WEALTHY AND WISE.

The after-work business

For many Canadians, the idea of owning their own business is now a reality

It may be time to retire the term 'retirement.' In fact, a Statistics Canada study released in 2005 found that retirement is now more commonly a continuum that may include part-time work, consulting, transitioning to a new career, or starting a small business. The same study found that fully 26 per cent of Canadians had worked, or looked for work, after their first 'retirement.' Anecdotal evidence indicates those numbers are growing each year.

Many people aren't waiting for a retirement date to begin their second career, but are viewing midlife as an opportunity to transition into a more satisfying and balanced professional life. In 2004, boomers constituted 54 per cent of self-employed workers, an increase of almost six per cent since 2000.

According to research conducted by BMO Canada, there are many reasons Canadian boomers are turning to entrepreneurship, including keeping occupied (46 per cent of men and 34 per cent of women); realization of a dream, (27 per cent of men and 31 per cent of women) and the need to supplement income (26 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women).

None of these trends surprise small business expert Roy Prevost, a consultant and coach to small businesses from Nova Scotia to Victoria, who often works closely with local chambers of commerce. He has witnessed these shifts among his clients, but he also has very personal experience – he transitioned from a 25-year career in retail and wholesale to small business training and development at the age of 55. "When circumstances forced me out of the company I was working with, I decided it was an opportunity to get very clear about what I wanted to do, and do it."

During his first career, Mr. Prevost had developed a wealth of experience in owning a retail store, wholesaling, manufacturing and exporting. But he'd also always known that his passion and natural talents lay in teaching and public speaking, so he began designing a business around the intersection of the needs of small business owners with his own experience and abilities. Today, five years later, he has helped hundreds of Canadian small business owners develop marketing strategies, implement more effective customer attraction and retention processes, and focus efforts on those activities that build their businesses.

Some of his advice has been tested in growing his own business as a consultant and coach. "One of the initial challenges was self doubt," he says. "(At midlife) we tend to look at the world in a jaded way. When you set out to cre-



PHOTO: LYNN FALCONER

At age 55, Roy Prevost transitioned from a 25-year career in retail and wholesale to focus his efforts on small business training and development. "When circumstances forced me out of the company I was working with, I decided it was an opportunity to get very clear about what I wanted to do, and do it."

ate something new, you think, if it hasn't happened before, why would it happen now?"

That self-doubt can be overcome with clarity of purpose, solid research and action, he says. "When I'm coaching people, I ask them to describe what they'd like to do in more detail, and most have difficulty doing that. I ask them to write out exactly what they want to do, and send it to me. Once that's clear, success depends on absolute action. Another very serious challenge for people starting a business is a sense of inertia – everybody's getting ready to get ready. The key is to go out and make the mess and then clean it up later. Just go out and do it."

That doesn't mean, he is quick to agree, that every business idea is a good one. Many boomers fund their businesses with their retirement savings, so it is imperative to avoid undue risk by choosing a familiar business or one that is already operating successfully and doesn't require extensive investment to reach profitability. It is also crucial, he says, to conduct market research to ensure there is in fact a viable market, and to choose a business that generates immediate cash flow.

"You don't want a 30-year business plan when you start a business in midlife," says Mr. Prevost.

For people who have clarity of purpose, a driving passion and a quantifiable market, he says, a virtuous cycle begins with action. "The more success you have, the more confident in your own abilities you become. Confidence

breeds confidence and success breeds success; you will have setbacks, but you continue

forging forward and find that serendipitous situations arise. You meet the right people,

you say and do the right things – and things begin to happen." ■

Connecting with your potential customers

For boomers whose 'retirement plan' includes launching a business, small business expert Roy Prevost recommends these strategies for developing a customer base.

- **Mine your local newspapers.** Watch for names of people who have been promoted, won awards, opened new businesses, or who in any way may be potential customers. Send them personalized mailings about the benefits of what you sell – mention that you read about them, and congratulate them on their success or endeavours.
- **Watch for events that may bring your potential market together.** Contact the organizers of the event and offer to give away your product or service as a prize during the event in exchange for having the group promote you in their promotions.
- **Give a little to get a lot.** Give away free samples of your product and ask the recipients to tell their friends if they are pleased. Or, if you are a consultant, give away some free advice, perhaps in the form of a newsletter or a free consultation.

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Small business, Join the club

• According to Industry Canada, small businesses (with fewer than 100 employees) comprise 97 per cent of goods-producing employer businesses and 98 per cent of all service-producing employer businesses. Businesses with fewer than 50 employees account for 95 per cent of all service-producing employer firms.

• Small business is a key employment engine in Canada: Between 1993 and 2003, businesses with fewer than 100 employees created 748,000 net jobs, and businesses with between 100 and 499 employees created 263,00 net jobs. During the same period, businesses with 500 or more employees lost 44,000 net jobs.

• In 2005, self-employed workers represented nearly 16 per cent of all employed workers in the Canadian economy, an increase of more than 20 per cent over the previous decade. About a third of self-employed workers are women.

• Statistics Canada says boomers accounted for 54 per cent of self-employed workers in Canada in 2004, up from 48.5 per cent in 2000.