

## **Peck and the Blue Collar Worker Mentality**

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One of the social theories of aging was Robert Peck's Stages of Psychological Development, in which he expanded upon Erikson's middle and late adulthood stages with four specific and detailed areas: mental flexibility versus mental rigidity, emotional flexibility versus emotional impoverishment, socializing versus sexualizing in human relationships, and valuing wisdom versus physical powers.

For the latter of the four adaptations to aging, Dr. Donald Roberson states, "Peck stresses that resolving these conflicts helps one to understand how to successfully arrive at the end of one's life. This enables the older adult to accept the limits of their physical body, and to creatively use the mind to negate these losses." This is not a problem for white collar workers who have an education. To start, their physical demands are significantly less than a blue collar worker who has a job lifting heavy machinery, working in a factory or plant, and creating more wear and tear on the body. Secondly, it is far easier for a white collar worker to move into a part-time job teaching, tutoring, consulting, or advising the younger class. They are able to impart the knowledge of their occupation into the upcoming generation. Adam Belz, who wrote "New Retirement Gap is Blue and White Collar," says, "White collar professionals like consultants, lawyers, and accountants are often able to retire gradually, finding ways to keep earning money in fields where they have connections and skills."

Unfortunately, the outcome can be problematic for blue collar workers who have labor educating jobs that not only force them to quit working due to health issues, but also retire long before reaching the age 65 and collecting full social security. Many workers have repeated surgeries, such as knee replacements, rotator cuff surgery, and hip replacements from all of the lifting, bending, and kneeling over years of working. Many have had multiple operations, but they continue to work to maintain health insurance, reach the retirement age, and need the money to support themselves. So for many, the options are as follows: keep working until you throw your back out again, get a part-time job that will pay less, or stop working all together. Tom Fossum worked pouring concrete, but he is getting older and is physically not able to continue in that

capacity. Fossum says, "They basically retired me at age 54 because I couldn't do my job anymore. I'd love to do concrete again, but it just ain't happening," according to "New Retirement Gap is Blue and White Collar." Fossum also discussed how his job got him out every day, meeting people, and socializing with friends. He is going to retire and receive 2/3 the amount of his pension, which will put him in great financial strain. What makes this worse for labor workers is that the retirement age is likely to increase to age 70 by 2020.

The main problem surfacing is that blue collar workers are having to retire early. But like I said, that is just the surface problem because there needs to be efforts made to not only allow them to retire and receive full benefits, but also to continue working by using the "value of wisdom."

Well, if the age for retirement does increase because of the continued increase to the longevity of life, it needs to be noted that for most blue collar workers, they start work earlier than white collar workers. John Leland, a write for the *New York Times*, states, "Blue-collar workers often spend more years paying into Social Security because they start full time work younger."

Therefore, one option is to reduce the age of retirement of categorized manual labor jobs or place a minimum year workload on physically demanding jobs. However, this does not answer the question on how to increase the "value of wisdom" for blue collar jobs, which would enable them to continue working, but simply at a different capacity. Well, Chris Farrell, who works for Twin Cities Publishing, has done research on blue collar workers and "unretirement." One of his first responses discusses technology in the workplace, specifically factories. He states that machinery and technology have aided individuals and the manual labor with the use of "high tech gear and brain power rather than brawn and physical endurance." Although many of these occupations work with their hands, many new jobs in factories deal more with operating machinery and turbines, instead of required physical endurance. Also, New Century Careers is a non-profit organization, based out of Pittsburgh that developed entry level teachers who have experience in manufacturing. It is a new form of career building for those who no longer have the physical ability, but can still use their knowledge to educate the younger generation.

There is also the "Blue Collar Boomerang Mentor." This is where industries hired retired skilled workers as mentors. Farrell writes, "Tennant Company, a Minnesota based designer and manufacturer of floor maintenance equipment, scrubbers, sweepers, buffers, and the likes brings

back some of its retired technical workers through flexible schedules." On a last note, many truck drivers are forced into early retirement, but that, too, is changing. For some jobs, there is not necessarily a change in the adaptation from physical worker to mentoring, but with truck driving, there are some adaptations that can be made to the equipment, so at least, individuals in that profession can continue working longer. For example, many companies are changing manual transmissions to automatic ones, which reduces strains, risks, and manual labor. Many companies are also looking at couples driving in a "lifestyle team" approach to help reduce the physical demands by sharing them with a spouse. To continue with adaptations, there are a lot of blue collar workers who move from manual work like climbing ladders to do electrical repair to other less physically demanding jobs. Farrell states, "Some older electricians, weary of climbing up and down ladders and lugging heavy equipment, get qualified to become estimators on the electrical work for projects."

Overall, I can see an easier transition for a white collar worker to move from a career of thirty plus years to a less demanding role, such as mentoring a new generation or serving on a board of representatives, but this same transition can work for blue collar workers. The ideology that blue collar workers learn on the job and do not have any wisdom to impart is a fallacy. With advancements to technology, career offers as mentors, adaptations to equipment, and certificate and qualifying options to become surveyors, it is easy to see that "With a bit of creativity, there are plenty of unretirement opportunities in all kinds of jobs: blue and white collar," according to Farrell.

### **References**

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