

Quality Qorner

Do Get Left Behind!

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The statistics clearly show the aging demographic of laboratory professionals and that a large percentage of us will be retiring within the next six to eight years or so. I certainly hope to be among them! I've worked in the blood bank and medical laboratory environment for over 35 years (has it *really* been that long already?) without the extended break that some take for a sabbatical or for family reasons. Maybe it's time for me to join the wave of 78 million baby boomers who have reached the watershed of the final years of their careers. Maybe it's time to start planning all the remaining adventures of my dreams.

Many boomers with five or fewer years of work ahead of them are not motivated by career prospects or power moves. Perhaps then, this is a good time to reframe our "final five" as the time to create a legacy, not a time of decline, so that those years can retain purpose and meaning. As described in an article from a recent issue of a major airline's in-flight magazine (I spend a lot of time on airplanes), there are many ways to create such a legacy before moving on to post-career life. Here are a few that any laboratory professional in any position could consider. Find one or two that could complement your final work years and also benefit your laboratory.

Transfer Knowledge to Younger Workers

If you have good verbal communication skills, are a good listener, and are patient, you might be a good candidate for training younger workers or for delivering laboratory orientation to new employees. Or offer to give a lunchtime brown-bag session—alone or with another boomer colleague—on "The Top Ten Things I've (We've) Learned That Will Help You in Your Laboratory Career."

Be a Mentor

A mentor is a senior person who forms an informal working relationship with a younger person to help him or her understand the unspoken rules for success in the laboratory. Through a mentoring partnership, you could help others to value their creativity and contributions to the laboratory's success. Mentors can serve as sounding boards for their young partner's ideas or problems and also as advisors or reviewers of any projects in which the mentee is involved.

Create a New System or Process

You've been a laboratory professional for a long time and you probably see how things could be done faster, using fewer resources with less waste, or could be more effective in meeting requirements. Perhaps you like computers as a hobby and could design a simple database program to track equipment

maintenance or staff training records better than your present paper-based system. Maybe you have an idea for how to better manage reagents or supplies to reduce unnecessary waste or outdated. The people with some of the best ideas for improving laboratory work processes are the people closest to the work—and that's you.

Become a Trusted Advisor

When supervisors and managers no longer also work at the bench, they may be cut off from what's happening at the staff level, which can make it harder for them to have the benefit of that insight to make good decisions. Many boomers at the staff level see firsthand what's really happening and also see any fallout from management decisions. When shared in a positive way, your insight could make you a trusted advisor. For example, you see that a supervisory decision has actually complicated the work flow. If you've had a good working relationship with that supervisor, you could advise him or her of these complications and suggest a solution.

Speak the Unspoken

If you have a good reputation in the laboratory and a history of making valuable contributions, you may be able to get away with voicing some concerns you may not have had the courage to express in the past and that others would not, or could not, comfortably share.

You've spent a significant portion of your life working as a medical laboratory professional. Because the laboratory is vital and ever-changing, opportunities will always exist to use your wisdom and create a meaningful legacy. How wonderful to be remembered for something you left behind that made a difference for you, your colleagues, and your laboratory.

This Month's Quality Quote:

"Any supervisor worth his salt would rather deal with people who attempt too much than with those who try too little."
—Lee Iacocca



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