

HOW LONGER LIFESPANS MIGHT SHAPE CAREERS

BY GRETA A. DAVIS

For decades, career planning has been built on a simple assumption: learn early, work for 35 to 40 years, then retire. But what happens when people routinely live longer, healthier lives? Researchers at the Stanford Center on Longevity have spent years exploring what they call the redesign of long life, but they have focused more on healthcare, biotechnology, and social policy. The implications for the individual are also significant. As life expectancy and the number of years people remain healthy and active increase, many professionals may spend far more years working, contributing, and learning than previous generations.

Professionals who enter the workforce at 22 and remain active into their 70s or 80s could potentially work for 50 to 60 years. And industries, technologies, and job demands continually change. As a result, career reinvention is becoming less of an exception and more of an expectation.

In the last 30 years, we've seen individuals change jobs while staying in the same or similar careers. With increased longevity, it's more likely that workers may have more than one career path. For example, an engineer may become an entrepreneur, then later transition into teaching or consulting. A healthcare professional may move into administration, public policy, or leadership development. Career shifts that once seemed unusual are becoming much more common. Instead of climbing a single ladder, professionals may navigate a series of career journeys that reflect evolving interests, strengths, and opportunities.

These new realities require adaptability and flexibility. Technical expertise remains important, but the ability to learn, reskill, upskill, and evolve may become an even more valuable asset. As technology continues to reshape industries, professionals who maintain a growth mindset and continuously develop new skills will be better positioned to navigate change. Certifications, microcredentials, graduate education, and online and experiential learning are necessary investments throughout your career.

Longevity also challenges traditional ideas about retirement and opens up many possibilities later in life. The concept of working full speed until age 65 and then permanently leaving the workforce might not meet the needs of individuals whose life expectancy will take them to their 95th birthday with many healthier and

productive years between 65 and 85. Instead, many professionals may pursue phased retirement, consulting work, entrepreneurship, part-time roles, or portfolio careers that combine multiple interests and income streams.

Perhaps most importantly, longer lives create more opportunities to pursue meaningful work. If a career spans six decades, few people will want to do the same thing throughout that entire period. Personal values, interests, and priorities naturally evolve. Career reinvention provides a pathway to align work with changing goals and life stages.

The emerging longevity era suggests a fundamental shift in how we think about careers. Success will depend less on making a single "right" career choice and more on building the capacity to adapt, learn, and reinvent ourselves over time.



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