

Viva: Starting your own business at 60



There's a common perception that we are less likely to take risks as we get older. Yet, research found that baby-boomers are the fastest growing entrepreneurship cohort anywhere in the world with the trend likely to increase as the population ages.

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Uganda-born Clim Pacheco enjoyed the success of an executive lifestyle having managed the entire transport network of Victoria and ran the department of management and leadership at a TAFE in south-east Melbourne.

But when Pacheco turned 60, a chance party conversation prompted him to plunge into the unknown.

“And that evening, one of my old mentors told me ‘how come you are still in the same job?’ That night I didn’t sleep. I decided I was going to change careers and overnight. I decided to resign and do this.”

After resigning the next day, Pecheco soon founded Business Transformation Solutions, providing consultancy services to social and community organisations using the management skills he’s acquired over a lifetime.

“The fright was there. The fear of change was there but the consonance that I could do it because I’ve supported every other facet of industry from finance to marketing to management to leadership. So why can’t I do it myself? Once I’ve overcome that personal barrier, I immediately said, ‘I’m going to do it.’”

According to research by La Trobe University’s Professor of Entrepreneurship Dr. Alex Maritz, baby-boomers aged 50 to 65 are the fastest growing cohort of entrepreneurs in Australia, comprising a third of the nation’s fastest growing young firms.

“They are more capable of starting a business than their younger counterparts. Largely, they’re more capable because of what I call ‘university of life’. They’ve got more developed networks. They’ve got often better leverage to finance, better networks and general skills throughout their lives. Senior entrepreneurs are more efficient and more effective than their younger counterparts in paid employment.”

Nearly three in ten respondents of a [2018 joint survey](#) conducted by the Australian Human Resources Institute and the Human Rights Commission said their organisation was reluctant to hire someone over a certain age. Over two-thirds indicated that cut off age is 50

Clim Pacheco says ageism is unfortunately a familiar story among his peers.

“I’ve noticed that a lot of my friends, basically, after they reach 40, they were restructured, out of jobs mainly because of technology. Once that happens, they look for full-time work, could not get it, look for part time work, could not get it, and then went into depression.”

Bambi Price who started an IT business at 50 founded the “SeniorPreneurs” meet-up group six years ago. It now has over 3000 members across Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide.

Price says many boomers are driven to start their own business out of necessity as they face retrenchments in the workplace.

“People are being marginalised in the workforce when they hit 45. I don’t know why? I mean, I’ve got more knowledge now than I had when I was in my 20s and 30s, so why wouldn’t you capitalise on that? Why wouldn’t you take advantage of it?”

According to the Comprehensive Australian Study of Entrepreneurial Emergence research project, the average age of Australian entrepreneurs is 45 while the average age of mature aged entrepreneurs is 57.

Professor Martiz says social ventures are especially gaining momentum among mature aged entrepreneurs.

“And that’s usually from an economic and social benefit perspective. Economic being supplementing their income, and from social perspectives, more psychological to active ageing, work life balance and that type of thing and that’s very important towards how they finance their ventures.”

Pacheco says starting his own business was the best career move he's ever made. He now structures his week around what he calls the 3 + 1 + 1 = 10 concept for a fulfilling life.

Three of his days are dedicated to working for an income, one day is all about learning and another day is devoted to community work.

"I've learnt that giving is probably even more important in life than getting. In my case, I'm a baby-boomer who decided to start giving at 60 too late. I've seen the youth and I've seen them actually doing what I'm trying to do now at the age of 20."

Professor Maritz says evidence shows that mature-aged entrepreneurs are more capable of starting a business than their younger counterparts.

Interestingly, while younger entrepreneurs work an average of 23 hours a week, earning about \$115,000 a year; their senior counterparts work only 18.5 hours a week, making about \$264,000 a year.

Grey entrepreneurs are also getting into what Professor Maritz calls "hybrid entrepreneurship".

"Now, hybrid entrepreneurship is when people are employed in full-time employment and they do entrepreneurial activities on the side. They get involved in passion project. It's not within the same domain as their full-time employment."

Price observes that migrants tend to have an advantage in their entrepreneurial endeavours over their Australian-born counterparts.

"They had moved from somewhere else. They'd seen something they'd done in their home country and so you know what? It's not even offered here or it's a different way of offering something here."

After running countless education sessions on entrepreneurship, Professor Maritz concludes that not everyone is born to be an entrepreneur.

“The most challenging thing is not teaching people about business. It’s not teaching people about the market they are about to serve and how to develop plans, design thinking, lead startup - that type of thing. The biggest challenge is enabling these people to have an entrepreneurial orientation. Things such as creativity, innovative approaches, risk-taking, proactivity. It’s a mindset and getting that mindset compared to being employed in all the years before that is a very challenging thing.”

A major hurdle many emerging grey entrepreneurs face is the lack of support.

“Especially if they’ve come out of corporate world they’ve come out of working with a group of people and so they’re not on their own. So when they go to do anything they might go into a meeting come up with an idea and say, ‘okay, let’s do this, and then, they turn around, and go, oh, I’m here on my own. I have to do it.’”

Pacheco says city councils provided a wealth of information as he navigated his way into the start-up world.

“They were doing a lot of activities for small business and entrepreneurs that has been the best thing I’ve done so it’s the support that you get when you want to move into this sort of risky areas that you cannot actually underestimate.”

Pacheco now wakes up every morning with a new found outlook on life.

“For the first time, I’m not responsible for anyone or at the same time, no-one’s responsible for me. I get up in the morning now and say to myself, ‘how lucky am I?’. I did take the risk I did push it and luck comes because I did take the risk.”