



What's A Workamper?

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I just learned that my father-in-law was ahead of his time as a “Workamper” twenty years ago. He was your typical Prairie “snowbird” when he left his home in Winnipeg and headed south to either Texas or Florida – far away from the frigid winter months in his recreational vehicle (RV). He would often talk about doing small jobs around the RV Park while he was down south a few times a week and getting paid for it. We didn’t think much of it except that it was good to introduce additional activities into his weeks and months in the sun.

Apparently there is now an emerging trend called “unretirement” practiced by “Workampers.” According to Workamper News out of Arkansas, their definition of Workampers are *“adventurous individuals, couples and families who have chosen a wonderful lifestyle that combines ANY kind of part-time or full-time work with RV camping. If you work as an employee, operate a business, or donate your time as a volunteer, AND you sleep in an RV (or on-site housing), you are a Workamper!”*

Workamper News is quick to also point out that not all Workampers are retired. “In fact, less than half of all Work-

ampers consider themselves retired. With the median age being 53, it is obvious that the majority of Workampers are not drawing a pension and cannot subsist on rent-free camping alone.”

Given the emerging “unretirement” trend – perhaps we will see the median age increase for Workampers. A Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce poll in July 2011 found only half of Canadian Boomers aged 45 to 64 have regular savings programs in place. And a TD Waterhouse survey found 31% of retirees aged 55 to 70 are spending more in retirement than expected. Here are some of the key findings from the March 2011 Sun Life Canadian Unretirement Index:

- Canadians are less optimistic about retirement. This is most evident when it comes to receiving retirement benefits at a level comparable to today’s retirees and their view of the cost of living. Most notably, Canadians are concerned about the cost of gasoline, home energy, food, house prices and the level of taxes.

- Only one-third of Canadians are satisfied with what they are saving for retirement. When it comes to their retirement income, only 54% of Canadians surveyed are at all confident that they will be able to take care of basic living expenses, 42% that they will be able to cover medical expenses, 39% that they will have enough money to pursue their hobbies and interests in retirement and 36% that they will have the money to enjoy the lifestyle they want. The biggest risks that Canadians feel they will need to address in their retirement are costly health care (49%), their money not lasting a full lifetime (45%), inflation (41%) and the need for long-term care (41%).

- Canadians are changing their expectations about retirement, and there is a clear shift toward working longer. The average age that Canadians expect to retire has increased three years compared to previous studies. In 2008 and 2009, Canadians on average expected to retire between 64 and 65 years of age. In this most recent survey, the average age anticipated is close to 68.

- Close to two-thirds expect to be working out of necessity at age 66. Sixty-two per cent of those who expect to still be working at 66 said it will be “because I have to.” Working longer is also the most likely action cited to address an anticipated retirement income shortfall. This is even more pronounced among those closest to traditional retirement age and in lower income groups. In 2009, the majority said they would be working at 66 out of choice, 54% “because I want to.”

- Men and women have different views when it comes to retirement. Just over half (55%) of all men and women surveyed expected to still be working at age 66. However, more men expect to be working full time than women, 24% of men compared to 17% of women. Expected retirement age for men is 68.6 years old - almost two years longer than 66.7 years old for women. Men and women also differ in reasons why they expect to be working past normal retirement age. Women are likely to say that they will have to work (67% vs. 57% for men) and more men say that they will want to work (44% vs. 34% for women).

- Canadians are primarily focused on paying down debts. Forty-two per cent say this is their No. 1

financial priority, followed by saving or paying for housing (28%). Saving for retirement is down from 25% in 2009 to 17% this time. Saving for vacations, leisure activities and education are also down this year.

- More than half (53%) of Canadians took no action toward retirement planning in the last 12 months. Four in five, (79%) do not have a written financial plan and 63% do not have a financial advisor. Eighty-six per cent of Canadians with a group retirement or savings plan would like more advice.

- Confidence and optimism is much higher among those with a plan. Analysis shows that Canadians who have a written financial plan are much more positive than those without. They have an Un-retirement Index of 51 compared to the overall score of 39, and they are more confident in their ability to take care of themselves in retirement. Seventy-one percent are confident that they will have enough money to enjoy the lifestyle they want, compared to 30% without a plan. They also feel healthier and happier than those without a plan, scoring 69 in the health category of the index compared to 60 for those without.

- External planning support also improves confidence, either through a financial advisor or a group retirement or savings plan. Those with a plan or an advisor are also more likely to anticipate being fully retired at age 66. They are more confident that they will be able to take care of basic living and medical expenses, have money to enjoy hobbies, interests and the lifestyle they want and with their retirement saving generally. They are also the ones more likely to have taken action or advice in the last 12 months.

Most Workampers are in their 50's and 60's, and a little more than half of all Workampers work to supplement their retirement income, while the rest work to support a full-time, or near full-time, RV lifestyle. If this sounds appealing to you, there is even Workamper University to determine if this is for you, here is the link -- <http://www.workamper.com/education/>

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