

Encore careers represent a significant shift in how we think about later-life work. Marc Freedman, founder of Encore.org(now called Cognerate), popularised the term “encore career” to describe careers that combine personal meaning, social impact, and continued income, typically starting in one’s 50s or 60s.

Common examples include:

- Teachers transitioning to become education policy advocates or tutoring underserved communities.
- Business executives moving into nonprofit leadership or social enterprise.
- Healthcare professionals shifting to patient advocacy or health education.
- Corporate professionals becoming mentors or starting consulting practices focused on social impact.
- Skilled trades workers teaching their craft to young apprentices

Key benefits research has identified:

1. Personal fulfilment through meaningful contribution to society.
2. Continued cognitive stimulation that may help prevent cognitive decline.
3. Flexible schedules that allow for better work-life balance.
4. Opportunity to utilise accumulated wisdom while learning new skills.
5. Maintenance of social connections and professional identity.

The MetLife Foundation has conducted studies showing that approximately 9 million Americans aged 44-70 are already engaged in encore careers, with roughly half of current retirees expressing interest in pursuing similar paths.

A particularly interesting aspect is how encore careers often bridge generational gaps. Experienced professionals mentor younger colleagues while simultaneously learning new perspectives and technologies from them. This two-way exchange benefits both groups.

Key strategies for successfully transitioning into an encore career, drawing from research and case studies, are:

Pre-Transition Planning:

- Financial preparation is crucial. Experts recommend saving 1-2 years of living expenses before switching, as encore careers often start with lower compensation.
- Start exploring while still in your current role through volunteering, board service, or part-time work to test different interests.
- Conduct informational interviews with people already working in your target field to understand the realities and requirements.

Skill Development:

- Take inventory of your transferable skills.
- Identify skill gaps through job posting analysis.
- Consider certificates or focused training programs rather than full degrees.
- Look for “bridge” programs designed explicitly for encore transitions (some community colleges offer these).

Network Transformation:

- Join professional associations in your target field.
- Attend industry conferences and workshops.
- Connect with other encore career seekers through organisations like Cogenerate, Wisdom Circle or The Courage Chapter.
- Leverage LinkedIn to showcase your evolving professional identity

Common Transition Paths:

- The “Side Hustle” Approach: Growing a new venture while maintaining current employment.
- The “Deep Dive” Method: Taking a sabbatical for intensive learning/exploration.
- The “Bridge Job” Strategy: Taking an intermediate role that builds relevant experience.
- The “Portfolio” Approach: Combining multiple part-time roles during the transition.

Some of the missteps to avoid are:

- Rushing the transition without adequate preparation.
- Underestimating the emotional adjustment.
- Neglecting to build new professional relationships.
- Trying to replicate previous income levels too quickly.
- Not being flexible about entry positions.

Success Factors:

- Setting realistic timelines (typically 2-3 years for complete transition).
- Maintaining professional identity while being open to new roles.
- Building support systems both personally and professionally.
- Being willing to start in junior positions despite senior experience.
- Focusing on impact and fulfilment over status.