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Canada's Association of Information Technology (IT) Professionals

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Global IT Skills shortage fact, or fiction? -- Part 2 of the series

Margaret's March 20th blog, "Global IT Skills shortage fact, or fiction?" has been generating discussion outside the CIM forum. I encourage you to make comments here too. Let your views and voice be heard.

Part 2 of the series from Margaret Evered:

American actress Billie Burke (1885 - 1970) quoted, "[Age is something that doesn't matter, unless you are a cheese](#)" - many IT veterans would disagree, when treated as past their "best before date" by 40! One stereotypical criticism of older IT workers is that they are inflexible, resistant to change, and have passé skills (I have seen many young IT staffers display the former traits too). We expect (say) doctors, lawyers, and pilots to keep current in their changing fields and most IT veterans do likewise. If we respect and reward other 40+ professionals' experience and skills, why do we disregard mature IT pros? Do we equate their vast experience with too much pay required?

Some IT baby boomers will retire shortly, but those caught in the employment crunch of the last few years cannot afford this. However, frequently companies are unwilling to let them work on fresh projects. Perusing online postings regarding the staff / skills shortage was sobering. One demoralised programmer, unable to believe that at 37 he was too old to be considered for new opportunities, was working exclusively on maintaining legacy systems. Part of the problem maybe managers recruiting someone in their image - young managers (late 20s to mid -30s) thus overlook veterans as hires, viewing them sometimes as threats. Too, veterans may not culturally fit into youthful teams often working incredible hours - - one youthful blogger contemptuously referred to a mature team member as "that old geezer". Veterans generally have families and want a work / life balance, so do we presume this translates to lower productivity? Studies show the contrary.

IT staff have been offshored, outsourced, downsized, and restructured lately - frequently feeling like disposable commodities. Older workers have often borne the layoff brunt. But if a shortage of IT workers truly exists, and a new wave of graduates is not on the horizon, we are going to need to invest in our veterans to survive the predicted crunch. Sometimes CIOs and organisational H.R., appear not to be working in tandem. Numerous IT staff have been let go in the Toronto Area - how galling is it then for the laid off to see a position advertised a few weeks later in their former organisation, requiring (almost) identical qualifications as their own? No wonder they speculate they were let go, because the organisation wanted someone younger and cheaper.

To the under-employed / unemployed 40+ IT pro there isn't any shortage. Why otherwise, with up-to-date skills, are they working as telemarketers, fast food counter help, etc? An Oracle DBA lamented her career prospects. "I never thought that after university, years of experience, and numerous professional courses I would be downwardly mobile". Surveyed recently, several recruiters revealed clients will not consider unemployed IT professionals: one rep commented employers only want employed professionals with "hot skills".

When you have a chance hiring managers, visit a major IT career fair. View the lines of eager hopefuls passing resumes to company reps, who spend usually only cursory minutes with candidates that have waited an hour or more. Look at the faces - young faces of the freshly graduated, new visible minority Canadians often in their 30s, and significant numbers of older pros. Why do we value experience and maturity in a surgeon, or the silver haired crew on our plane's flight deck? Older workers can help to recruit, inspire, and mentor the next generation of IT staff - "hot skills" indeed. As IT staff are increasingly expected to understand "the business" who better to initiate them. We have to tackle IT age discrimination and not waste an undervalued resource.

Thank you Margaret for providing your thoughts on this important area - what are your opinions in the audience?

Stephen Ibaraki, I.S.P.

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Comments

re: Global IT Skills shortage fact, or fiction? -- Part 2 of the series

Tuesday, March 28, 2006 5:37 PM by [jointer](#)

As I commented in a previous post regarding part 1 of Margaret's excellent input on the topic, I can readily identify with the "age" issues. If you think it is tough to face apparently being "over the hill" in the IT world in your 40's, try your 50's. You find yourself between a rock and a hard place, not able to afford to retire (even if you wanted to) and not able to get employment. I am very, very fortunate that, due to events totally outside my professional arena, I could, if I wished, retire.

Having said that, my "brain" is definitely not ready to retire. If it were I wouldn't be blogging here on a fairly regular basis nor would I devote the time to try and make VANTUG a growing and successful UG. In fact the discussion here has only served to stimulate me, for which I am grateful, and further convince me how we are wasting such a valuable resource when it comes to older IT Pros.



John Oxley
Director IT Pro Evangelism
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Many of these people are already the "versatilists" that Stephen has indicated is where the industry is going. What better way to use them than as "mentors" for the younger people. It may even be that many of these people are perfectly able and willing to manage at a salary well below what employers often seem to be "scared" of. They may have retired from a fairly senior position but want to continue to be productive and "give something back". I certainly have been made to feel on more than one occasion that I should just "fade away and go of into the sunset".

Maybe Stephen isn't fully aware of it but meeting him gave me a new injection of belief in myself for which I will always be grateful. His knowledge of and energy and enthusiasm for the IT industry comes through in this blog on a daily basis.

Cheers
Graham Jones
