

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor in chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

By now, we all know that COVID is reshaping the nation's workforce. In her new book, columnist and author, Kerry Hannon examines how some of those changes are impacting older, mid-career workers. In Control at 50+: How to Succeed in the New World of Work is out today, and Kerry is here to talk about it. Kerry, welcome.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here, Ramona. Thanks a bunch for inviting me.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Love to talk to you in general, and I'm very happy to talk about your new book because I was reading the beginning of it and I'm going to start with something really positive that I loved, which is older workers made it through the pandemic better than younger workers. That's the first part of your book, and I really thought that was great.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Well, I totally agree. Here's the thing. I tend to be sort of an upbeat person anyway, but this is something we can really latch onto because surveys and studies have shown that in fact, we weren't so rattled by the pandemic and the shutdown, and all the trauma and shifting around in our working and personal worlds and that's not totally surprising because older workers are older and are more experienced individuals. We've been through a lot. We've seen ups and downs, we've been through lots of setbacks and we weathered it in a way like, "Okay, this is what we need to do," very practical and got through it without ... I'm not saying everyone didn't have some emotional adjustment and there were stresses that we didn't expect, but this is the good news and it really teases out what makes us great in the workplace as well, is because we have that maturity, that ballast, that attitude.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I couldn't agree more because that to me is the value of an older, mid-career worker. Anyone who's been in the workforce for 20 years plus, and our ability to problem solve, our ability to have that institutional knowledge of something, and how to work with other people, I think is a key benefit for being someone who's got that experience. I don't think that's valued. It should be. I think sometimes hiring managers don't look at us that way. So is there any shift in the ageism because of COVID and what we just talked about?

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Yeah, well, I truly hope so. You and I have been in this space for a while, so it's incremental. These changes are incremental, but I see the bright lights coming out of this period in time, is that, in particular, the labor market right now is pretty tight. And there are two jobs open for everyone who's unemployed, and in fact I have... and I don't have the hard numbers on this, but anecdotally, a lot of people I know who are over 50 and over 60 are getting jobs right now because employers just want

somebody who can come do the job, who can get there, they don't have to train, they don't have to invest in. They need workers, they want you.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

So to me, it's not like, "Oh, we are now changing the way we think about older workers," but in fact that they're saying, "We need you," and I'm hoping this gets it in a motion, that they see the results, they see that this worked for them.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

In your book, you talk about five enduring changes in the work workforce. Let's talk about those. So give me one of them and let's discuss it.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Well, we'll start with the most obvious. So remote work is here to stay, the genie's out of the bottle, and it was there before. All of these trends, Ramona, actually, were started pre pandemic, but what happened is the pandemic was pedal to the metal, it accelerated these things. And I'd like your thoughts on this too, but I think with remote work and we were just talking about ageism, it's fabulous for older workers because in many ways, when you're working remotely, you're not being judged on your cover. You're being judged on your performance and your productivity and it's subliminal, but if you're not standing right next to somebody who's 30 years younger than you... You know what? That can create ageism. When you take away that, it really, I think, is a big, big thing that helps push that envelope when you're judged really by who you are and your skills.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

And the second thing is if you have your mobility issues of any kind or health issues, if you can work remotely and you don't have to worry about the commute and an employer having the right office set up for you, boom, you can actually have access to more work than you had before. So that's one thing and I'd love to hear your thoughts on that as well.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I totally agree with you because I think that there is this bias in the workplace, again, that these are old tropes that you can't get rid of sometimes and maybe we'll be shifting a little bit, but the idea that older people are afraid of technology and they're not good workmates. So if you are side by side with someone and your boss tends to be younger, they may gravitate to a younger person, as opposed to gravitating to you, because maybe they don't have stuff in common. Hey, look, I've always tried to be up to date on culture and I have friends of all ages.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I try very hard not to fit into this kind of, "Oh my God, that's a different generation." I try to do that, but back to the point of that is if you have a boss who sees that and thinks you're outside of this workplace camaraderie and culture that they're creating, the remote work can ease some of that tension, maybe in a workplace. You can do your job, you can turn in what you have to turn in and they can judge you on your performance and not judge you on your looks or their own bias and attitude. So I'm a hundred percent with you on that.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One thing I do point out to people though, is these are knowledge based jobs. These are jobs that can be performed anywhere, but there is so many people in our society, no matter what their ages are, cannot work remotely. So I don't think it will ever shift to fully remote, because I think there are too many things that have to be done by hand, too many small businesses who can't afford to have a big remote staff and support the IT that maybe needs to go with it in some cases. So when we talk about remote, I say, yes, I see a shift, but I also think it's never going to totally be remote. Your grocery store people can't be remote despite what Jeff Bezos wants, where he wants you to go in and scan your own food at Whole Foods. What about those people who can't work remotely?

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Yeah, I think that's absolutely an issue and we can't ignore that so that's not going to go away and that's something that employers... but again, I think having a tight labor market is going to provide opportunities for workers whom are experienced, and the key there for many people is if you were downsized or laid off during the pandemic, is you can't try to replicate whatever job it was you were doing exactly. You need to be open for invitations to do new kinds of work. So even if you do have a position that's not white collar that you need to go back into, how can you shift or look for ways to redeploy the skillset you have from the work you've been doing to do some some different kind of work?

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

It may very well be you have to be in person, but I think the important thing is to be creative and curious about new ways of doing things. It's super hard to do, I know it's easier to say than to do it, but being open to invitations is one way to look for a new way to do your work.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

The other thing, Ramona, that is good and bad along these lines coming out of the pandemic is I see a surge in contract work. So employers figure it out, "Oh my gosh. Okay, well you can work remotely from home. That saves me a lot of money because I don't have the office space necessarily, but I also can hire you on a contract basis and I don't have to pay benefits." So there's a surge if you look at any of the job postings, there's a lot of contract work, part-time and for project based work, which in many ways is fabulous for experienced workers who want that kind of thing. They want that flexibility. They had time during the pandemic to think about their priorities, how it fits into work-life balance, all that great stuff, but that's really good, maybe if you're 65 or over.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

But if you are still under 65 and you need health benefits and you really want to retirement plan that's employer provided and has the matching stuff from employer, all that great setup of that benefit package, this is a red light because yeah, they may be willing to hire more older workers, more experienced workers, but there comes with this caveat. So I caution people know what it is you need from your job or use it to keep your resume alive while you keep looking for that full time thing.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Great point. There's been times in my own life where I have worked... I've been a journalist for decades and there's been gaps, and what I have done is exactly what you're talking about, is as a contract

worker, taken the skills that I have accumulated over the years and turned them around and helped benefit some like CEOs that I worked with or startups that I worked with, I could help them understand certain spaces that I understood. So I worked with them until I found a full-time job that had those benefits that I wanted to take.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So you're absolutely right. It can give people with experience that flexibility as long as they can afford it, right? As long as they can afford the benefits and there's many ways that comes up for people and for people who want to keep working, that's another great way to do it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What do you think, and this comes to another point that you make about, is this a great resignation or is it a great reset? So are people saying, "Oh, I'm just going to take advantage of COVID. I'm going to retire now. I've been wanting to do it," or "I'm going to step back and reset my expectations at what kind of job I want to do?"

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Right. That's a great question. I see it, again, with my more positive attitude as a re-imagining of your work, of what it brings to your life. Is it a financial thing you're doing for? And that's important, then you have a certain set of things that you need a certain salary, that's what you're aiming for, but it could be that you want more flexibility or you want to do a bunch of different kinds of things to fill out and do some nonprofit, you want to try something new.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

One of the other big trends I see, and it goes along with this idea of being open to new opportunities, is huge surge in people transitioning careers or fields of work, and this is at all ages, but definitely the over 50 set. And the truth is it used to be, oh my gosh, if you did that, what an outlier you were, what a risk taker, you are going to be a second actor, you are going to go an encore career, but today it's becoming quite accepted because some of those jobs have really changed that people were doing. Some of this prioritizing, what we want to do, saying, "This is a time I'd really like to be doing X," or "This really interests me," or "This company's mission is what I want to do," or "This nonprofit, I want to make an impact on the world or I want to work for a company who I believe in."

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

So I think this career transition thing is really interesting and to tie into that quickly, and we can talk more about this, because I know what you do is involved in this, is education is out there. The virtual opportunities to learn online during the pandemic accelerated like crazy. So if you need to brush up on your skills, add new ones, just say, "Hey, I want to see if I like this," you can go do that now.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I think that true, because at WorkingNation, we are always talking about what are the next jobs that are coming up? What are the jobs now where you need certain skills? So I do see that trend too, where there are people older and younger who are saying, "I do need to get certain skills and that will get me a better job that will get me hired quicker because look, I've already got all this other experience and all I need is to brush up on some of that."

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So there's a lot of these smaller, three month programs where you can learn certain IT skills and maybe it works with your years of working in a restaurant as a manager and then you can mix it all together and you can say, "Hey, I can help a restaurant with their IT, and I'll probably make a lot more money than working the floor," right?

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Right. Yeah.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

But that's a great combination of experience and lifelong learning. We are seeing a lot more people do that of all ages and the higher every day, postsecondary ed programs, whether they're run by a nonprofit or whether they are run by a community college, are really catering to this mid-career worker and trying to make these opportunities to learn more work out for them in their regular life.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Yeah. And I think moving forward, this is going to benefit other generations coming behind us because frankly the higher education people have fewer people coming through the system as time goes on and they're going to need us. So they're going to want to be creating programming of some kind.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

The other thing that's interesting is I saw a statistic this week from an economist who I like a lot Nick Bunker over at Indeed, and he said that the March numbers show that 3.2% of the people who had retired a year ago in March were back at work. So just to point back to your point that you made, people I think stepped out, and then they gave some thinking and they've stepped back in, maybe in a different way, and that's what I'm hoping that we're seeing.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

The other thing that I've been following and I'm very certain you have, because I interviewed you about this, is that in fact employers are saying that they are going to shift their mindset and higher based on skills versus four year degrees. And that affects all of us at all different ages, people who don't have that four year degree. So I think that's encouraging, whether it's still lip service at this point or not. What are your thoughts on that?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I have seen that and I went to ASU GSV Summit and South by Southwest EDU, to big conferences with education as a focus, but each of them over the last, I'm going to say, four years that I've been doing this with them, going to these, there's been a workforce development issue that has come in. Skills were at the top of the conversation in almost every single one of these conferences and many, many of the panels and just coming out of everybody's mouths. Skills based hiring is the way to go, not denigrating at all a four year degree, because there's so much you can get from it.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Absolutely.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

... whether it's very specific things, you need to be a doctor or a liberal arts degree that just helps make you a more rounded human being in some cases. But the shift out of this is where the skills are, how do you get them, and then hiring.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I talked to somebody at SHRM recently and they were talking about how they're talking to the hiring managers in their organization about it now and skills are more important than the pedigree. They're talking about ways to... and again, we've talked about this, how do you shift out of that AI hiring bias-

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Yes, huge.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

... that if you don't have a four year degree, then you're immediately out of the pool.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Yeah. As you told me a piece of paper doesn't say whether you can do the job or whether you've done it, you've solved that problem before, only you can do that in person.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Absolutely. I do a lot of stuff with Opportunity@Work as well, and all about skills through alternate routes. That's stars. And I always point out, I am a Star myself. I am a senior in college, if you wanted to call it that. I dropped out of school.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

There you go.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And I started working and all the skills that I have and that have made my career a success, I learned on the job. I would've been out of so many jobs if that's all they looked at is whether or not I had a four year degree.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So I think there's so many people out there now, anybody listening, don't worry that you don't have that degree. You just need to be able to demonstrate that you have the skills and you have evidence of it.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Again, I think one of the things we talk about a lot with... and again, this is, to a certain degree, the white collar jobs that I'm talking about, but to get hired these days, it's not sending your resume through those AI systems. You ultimately will have to because if they posted a job, but you got to find somebody you know at that company, somewhere who can give you a leg up, an introduction to somebody, even if it's on the periphery, but somebody who can get you in the door that can vouch for you in some way,

because employers always have hired that way, but they're even more sensitive to not making a mistake in hiring.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

So they want somebody to say, "Hey, this person," and that way, if you don't have that four year degree, you have a better shot at it because you can sit down and say, "Hey, this is how I've done it." Now, for the piece I most recently talked to you about I talked to people at Bank of America, at Dell, at Accenture, big companies, Google has a huge initiative now on this skill-based hiring initiative that will link people who go through this program with employers who say they'll hire these individuals. We're getting in the weeds with this, but I honestly think it could be a shift, ultimately, in the whole world of hiring.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Yeah. I agree and anybody who wants to read more about that Google we've written a lot about it, which is great, the Google Certificates program and how they do point people to opportunities. So they could read it on workingnation.com. I don't want to leave people hanging with the fifth idea here that you saw, which I also love, which is entrepreneurship and this spark that people are taking, again, the skills, the skills that they have acquired on the job and turning it into their own business. As you said, "Hey, there's a new boss and it's you."

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Yeah, It's Me Inc. To tell you the truth, my whole life I always thought of myself as my own boss, even when I worked full time for somebody, but people at this stage in life are saying... First of all, you've been throwing out a lot of resumes and the rejections you're like, "Yeah, I'm so sick of that," or "I'm not going to go down that path again." And it's your time if you can do that, and these are micro businesses. I'm not saying you're starting the next Uber or something. You could be, but frankly, don't overthink it. It's kind of what might you want to get started doing?

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

And the numbers, they started before the pre pandemic, people over 50, Kaufman Foundation ran these numbers, it's even a bigger chunk now and we have studies coming out of MIT that say, "Hey, entrepreneurs over 45, over 50, are more successful than the younger ones," or I saw another study that I love people who started ho businesses from their hobbies are more successful than others, and it takes longer, it's like the tortoise and the hare, but they do because they know their customers. And because we can have virtual businesses, we don't have to have bricks and mortar, Ramona, it doesn't have to be a huge cash infusion. You can start in baby steps.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Before we go, we have a few more minutes, I'd love for you to share with us some of what you have come across that can help someone who's a mid-career worker looking to get back into the market or wanting to make the changes that they need to make the market. Do you have some tips for any older workers out there who saying, I do want to work. I need to work. What should I do now?"

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Yes. Well, some quickies is you need to do a budget. The financial piece is enormous. How much do you actually need from a job? What you do you need, because that will depend on what kind of job you're

headed for or what kind of job you can accept. No one wants to do a budget, but just try. How can you get lean and mean because that's going to be your biggest obstacle. And we always say debt is the biggest dream killer, so anything you can do to cut back on debt, downsize costs, that's really important.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Secondly do that inner MRI, what really do you want to do? Because you know what? They're hiring you, but you're also hiring them. So look at a company and go for something that really you're going to want to be there.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

I think that's an important piece of it and if you are thinking of starting your own business, if you have that financial balance to do that, go and apprentice a little bit, do some volunteer work, make sure that it's as dreamy as you think it's going to be to do that and talk to people who are doing those jobs.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

People absolutely love to talk about their work. So just do those informational talks, reach out to people and say, "Hey, tell me a little bit about what you're doing. What are the opportunities in this field?" It takes while a while, this is not going to happen overnight, but give yourself that space, if you can, to really be thoughtful about the work you're looking for at this stage in life.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Kerry, I think those are all great pieces of advice and I really appreciate that you joined me today to talk about your new book, In Control at 50+: How to Succeed in the New World of Work, out today.

Kerry Hannon, author, In Control at 50+:

Thank you

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Kerry, thank you and everybody, you can find the link to the book on our website. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor in chief of WorkingNation. Thank you very much for listing.