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ANTHONY BURNHAM: Welcome to Employed for life with Anthony Burnham

AB: Good morning Bill

BN: Good morning Tony, how are you?

AB: Welcome to the show. I'm well, how are you?

BN: I'm very well thank you

AB: Well, tell us about your organization

BN: Well AARP is an organization of people 50 and older. It's a membership organization and right now we're at about 37 million members. The membership is about one third people between the ages 50-60, about one third between the ages 60-70 and about one third are 70 and older. And half of our 37 million members are working full-time or part-time. They're working because they want to or they're working because they have to but they're in the workforce

AB: Is that a change, say, in over the last 10 years?

BN: Yes it is. More and more of our members have either been staying in the work force longer or moving back into it. You know that the whole concept of retirement is being reinvented and there are lots of people who are playing golf and there's nothing wrong with that, but there are plenty of others that are either working or they've gone back to school, they've become entrepreneurs. I mean it is a fascinating time in America

AB: What's driving this interest in re-employment or continuing career, do you think?

BN: Well I think there are several things. If you look at the employers side first, Tony, what's happening is that employers are figuring out that in many cases older workers have what they want. They have experience, they have institutional memory they have reliability, loyalty...All the things that employers care about. And also it used to be thought that older workers could not be retrained and keep up with modern technology and that's proving not to be true. So if you couple that with the fact that there are fewer younger workers coming up into the pipe-line, what you see is that in many industries such as sales certainly technology, health care, education and others, older workers are becoming more and more valued...so that's the employers side. Then you look at the employee side, people today are healthier than ever before. They're better educated than their parents and their grandparents. We've got research showing that about 80% of boomers say that they intend to work well into their retirement years and then people in their 60's and even 70's are already doing that. They're not necessarily

keeping the same jobs they had in some cases and in other cases they are. In other cases they're moving to other lines of work. They don't necessarily have to be the VP of a company anymore, often times they're looking for health care, they're looking for flexible work schedules. There are a number of things happening, as I say, it's an exciting time.

AB: It is an exciting time, but you believe that financial reasons coupled with living longer are the primary motivators for this re-employment surge?

BN: Well in many cases finance is a primary motivator. There are an awful lot of boomers and older people who have not saved enough for retirement or for some reason their company pension went south or got frozen or they lost money in the stock market reversal or what have you..so you do have people who need the financial support that working brings

AB: What about the internal reason for returning to work, purpose and fulfillment, is that driving a lot of this interest?

BN: Our research shows that it's a very high reason, people want to be productive. They want to stay engaged, they don't feel like they should be standing on the sidelines, that's very key.

AB: Do you think this interest in re-employment is a trend, something that's going to go away or do you think it's permanent?

BN: I think it's permanent. I think actually that there are two trends at the same time and it's going to be interesting to see how this plays out. On the one hand, Tony, I think there are a lot of companies who haven't gotten this message, who haven't felt the labor pinch and who are literally trying to push people out the door because they think that younger workers cost less. At the same time there's a trend that we've been talking about, the trend toward older workers and valuing older workers and I think that is the trend that will prevail. But right now you have these counter trends going on. Now one of the questions that I think has been asked and not really answered is do older workers cost more and there's a lot of sort of urban myth around that. And so we set out to try to figure out if we could quantitatively answer that question. So we retained Towers Perrin which as you know is a big consulting firm dealing with human resources and other things...and they analyzed the cost of hiring and retaining 50 plus workers and what they showed was that older workers do cost more. But it's a very marginal cost increase up to say about 3% depending on the industry. And then they also found that these costs are off-set with the cost of recruiting newer workers with the cost of training with the fact that you lose institutional memory and so forth. And so we are promoting this story far and wide. We want corporate America to really know about it and to use it as they think through their own strategies. I think this study is going to make a big difference.

AB: I agree and how are you going to publish that research study?

BN: Well, we have got it on our website and we have been sending it to corporations. We've been having conferences. We're also distributing it to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in addition to other ways. And we'd be happy to send it to anybody who wants it or they can go on AARP.org and get it

AB: And it seems to me that that would be valuable information for employers

BN: Yes absolutely, and we're now going to do the study again only we're going to do it internationally because there are so many multi-national corporations that are interested in this subject

AB: Tell me specifically, Bill, what AARP, in addition to research, is doing about this trend

BN: Well this is a big issue with us. This is one of the top priorities for us, this promoting older workers. So what we're doing is we have a program every year, the best employers for workers over 50, and each year more and more companies have been applying and it's a pretty rigorous evaluation. And we think that's one way to promote those companies that are doing a good job and hiring older workers. In addition to that we've been working with a number of trade and industry associations that represent businesses and what we're doing there is we're studying how the changing workforce is going to affect American business and identifying strategies for companies to address this shift. We also have a number of job opportunities with something we call our National Employer Team. And some of our partners are HOME DEPOT, PRINCIPLE GROUP, WALLGREENS, PITNEY BOWES, QUEST DIAGNOSTICS, BORDER'S so these are all companies that value older workers and want to hire them. And what we try to do is match up our members with their needs. And one of the best ways to do this is, we have a partnership with Monster.com so that their job seekers that go through AARP.org they can search through more than 800,000 job listings, job postings and they can also create and post their resumes. And of course this gets out to Monsters they've got hundreds of thousands of clients and this is a good way to sort of make this match

TB: Are you doing anything specifically related to career development for these folks that want to get back into the workforce

BN: Well we haven't done a lot in career development yet but that is an area that keeps popping up. Because one of the key responsibilities, as you know is, employees have to keep themselves employable. And so often times they do need retraining and they do need some technology refreshing and that's a responsibility that we all have as employees. So job training, re-careering those kinds of things are important

TB: So you've got someone sitting in front of you who is over 50, what's your advice to them

BN: Well first of all, we do know through research that over 50 it does take you longer to find a new job than somebody under 50. I mean that's just a fact of life in modern

America. So the first thing I would say is do not be discouraged, there are jobs out there and there are jobs in many sectors and I think it's important to present ourselves well and not do a resume that goes back to year ONE. Talk about recent experiences, talk about achievements. Use the networks that we all have. Go to AARP.org for sure. And I think be bold and enthusiastic and energetic because that's the way to get a job

TB: Yes, isn't it really talking about your experience and what you have produced with the skills that you've got?

BN: Yes I think that is so important but I think another part of it is also looking ahead is to be able to say to an employer you know I've done these important things and here is how they can apply to your company in the future

TB: Well this is great, this has been an interesting session and I think AARP is blessed to have you at the helm at this point in time because you understand some of the social and individual needs of the 50 plus workers

BN: Thank you, Tony