IN THEIR FIFTIES. TRUSTED TO RUN IT. STRUGGLING TO GET BACK IN.

What the evidence says about Britain's over-fifties, leaving work, and getting back in.

Generation X is running British business. Some of the same generation, in their fifties and sixties, are finding it hard to get back into work once the job ends. This report brings together the evidence: who leaves and why, how long getting back takes, what it costs, and where age changes who gets the interview. It also says what the evidence can't show, and what nobody counts.

THREE TIMES THE EXPERIENCE. HALF THE INTERVIEWS.

A 50-year-old with 31 years' experience in the work was invited to interview by 19.5% of employers. A 28-year-old with 9 years was invited by 35.3%. Field experiment, 190 jobs, England, 2017 to 2018. [2022-ev2]

Magnus Wood · Founder, Gen X at Work and Wild Leadership

genxatwork.com

CONTENTS

IN THEIR FIFTIES

Trusted to run it. Struggling to get back in. What the evidence says about Britain's over-fifties, leaving work, and getting back in.

A Monday with No Meetings 2

The Years That Made Us 3

The Findings on One Page 4

1 A Generation Carrying Responsibility 5

2 Out of Work Isn't the Same as Finished 7

3 After the Exit 9

4 Where Age Discrimination Is Shown 11

5 Some of Us Wanted to Leave 13

6 What Happens to Us Next? 14

7 Crazy Paving, Again 15

The Evidence Behind This Report 16

The Four Stories the Evidence Keeps Telling 16

Begin the Conversation 16

8 Claim Register, Method and Contact 17

Notes to Editors 19

Gen X at Work is at genxatwork.com. The Evidence, The Years That Made Us, Crazy Paving, the newsroom and Gen X Stories.

Cite as: Magnus Wood, In Their Fifties. Trusted to Run It. Struggling to Get Back In. Gen X at Work, first edition, November 2026.

Charts may be used with that citation. Each one carries a download link.

A MONDAY WITH NO MEETINGS

I write this report as one of the people in it. I was born on the edge of Generation X. Three times at the top of a business. Left three times, not always when I chose. If you're holding your ground in a senior role, I've done that. If you're working out what comes after, I'm doing that now.

I created this report and Gen X at Work (genxatwork.com) because I couldn't find one place that brought together the stories and the evidence of working life in our fifties and sixties. My feed, probably like yours, is full of "You know you're Gen X when..." memes, as well as people in our generation sharing and resharing posts about ageism at work. I create social content about Gen X at Work and I'm easy to find on LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook. But what I don't see is anything that gives me useful data that, as somebody no longer in the "Big Job", I can do things with.

It is Monday morning, or any day in the working week, and I am sitting down to my desk at home. No meetings. Not to work. Not even to apply for jobs (361 people have already applied for a position well below my experience and seniority). I am sitting down to create opportunities. To put myself out there so that people who can pay me can see my worth.

I am building new work as a writer and adviser. There is loss in it.

Money matters and it's nearly absent. But bigger than that has been the blow to who I think I am. Leaving my last role as a Chief Marketing Officer has also meant discovering how much of my identity had become attached to the title.

> *"Leaving my last role as a Chief Marketing Officer meant discovering how much of my identity had become attached to the title."*



THE YEARS THAT MADE US

Born around 1965 to 1980, many of us in our generation started work before there was a computer on every desk. Now we have AI in our pockets. The career ladder turned out to be snakes and ladders. So what happened to the working life we thought we were going to have?

In 1997 an executive coach, Robin Linnecar, told The Independent: “There is no such thing as a career path – it’s crazy paving and you lay it yourself.” So pave we did.

Nearly thirty years on, this generation is running British business. The average chief executive of Britain's 150 largest listed companies was born in 1969. More than a third of the controlling positions in British companies are held by people born between 1965 and 1980.

But some of the same generation, in their fifties and sixties, are finding out how hard it is to get back in once the job ends. 866,000 people aged 50 to 64 are looking for work or say they would like it. One man told the Guardian in September 2026: 598 applications, eight interviews.

We are at the top of our careers. And at the end of them. The discussion, rage at times, comes from people in their fifties and sixties complaining about ageism, and about their inability to get back into work. Sitting at home in their kitchens, or wherever they’ve set up their “work station”. More measured pieces write about the waste of all this talent and experience.

This report is laser-focused on those people not in work. Other work of mine looks at people still in work in what I call The Apex (wildleadership.co/the-apex), the top of the company where you have two jobs: deliver growth and defend your position.

So, our age. In our fifties and early sixties. Is that the problem?



START HERE

THE FINDINGS ON ONE PAGE

How much of the difficulty getting back into work after fifty is caused by age?

I can't say. Here is what is known, and where age has been shown to count.

2.9%
AT 50 TO 64

3.0%
AT 35 TO 49

1. Out of Work and Looking for It

About the same. These are the unemployed, as a share of everyone working or looking for work. The two rates have tracked each other since 2014. *UK, April to June 2026.* [2026-ev2]

25.7%
AT 50 TO 64

12.3%
AT 35 TO 49

2. Out of Work and Not Looking

This is where the real gap is. A quarter of 50 to 64 year olds are neither working nor looking for work. Sickness and disability, retirement and caring each explain part of it, and need telling apart. *UK, April to June 2026.* [2026-ev2]

Just over half
DIDN'T CHOOSE TO GO

3. Why People Left Their Last Job

Of people who left their last job in their fifties and early sixties, just over half left for reasons the International Longevity Centre counts as involuntary: ill health, caring or redundancy. *UK, ONS survey data, published September 2026.* [2026-ev1]

35.3%
FOR THE 28-YEAR-OLD

19.5%
FOR THE 50-YEAR-OLD

4. Getting an Interview

The older applicant had more than three times the experience and got just over half the interviews. Matched applications went to 190 restaurant, café and sales jobs in England in 2017 and 2018. In 34 jobs only the younger applicant was invited. In 4, only the older. [2022-ev2]

9.5%
LESS AN HOUR

5. Pay on Getting Back

Between 1998 and 2020, over-fifties who lost a job and found another came back on 9.5% lower hourly pay on average. Fewer than two in three were back within six months, against around three in four under fifty. [2021-r2]

WHAT IS NEW HERE.

I could find no published data on the age of people who control British business. I know, it surprises me. But I was able to take a massive amount of freely available data from Companies House and work that out. I was also able to work out from Companies House data the ages of people when they let go of the company they control. I couldn’t find this data published anywhere else.

THE MAIN CAVEAT.

Generation X was born between 1965 and 1980. Official data comes in age bands, not birth years, so 50 to 64 stands in for it here. That band leaves out the youngest of the generation and includes some people older.

A GENERATION CARRYING RESPONSIBILITY

Generation X is running British business. On 27 September 2026 I counted the age of every individual recorded as controlling an active British company on the Companies House register. There were 5,241,049 controlling positions.

- 38.6% are held by people born between 1965 and 1980. In companies above the small-company threshold it is 42.4%. [2026-own2]
- The average age of a person controlling a British company is 47. Where the company is substantial, the average is 60, and four in five controllers are fifty or over. [2026-own1]
- The average chief executive of Britain's 150 largest listed companies was born in 1969. Their chairs average 65. [2025-r5]

FIGURE 1

WHO CONTROLS BRITISH BUSINESS

Share of controlling positions held by people born 1965 to 1980



WHO AND WHEN	Every individual recorded as controlling an active British company on the Companies House PSC register. Register as at 27 September 2026.
SOURCE	Magnus Wood, own count from Companies House data · [2026-own2]
CAVEAT	Positions, not people: one person can control several companies. Listed companies are outside the register.

Thirty years of building experience brought many of us here.

The Apex (wildleadership.co/the-apex) is life at the top of a business. It is a place nobody prepares you for. You only stay while you deliver.

And the position can end long before the working life does.

In my experience very few top seats open each year, and what is offered instead is fractional, advisory and portfolio work. In the year to April 2025, Britain's 150 largest listed companies appointed fifteen chairs and nine chief executives. *Spencer Stuart, UK Board Index 2025.* In a Spencer Stuart survey of more than 1,000 current and former chief executives in Asia, Europe and North America, seven in a hundred former chief executives had taken another chief executive job. [2025-x11]

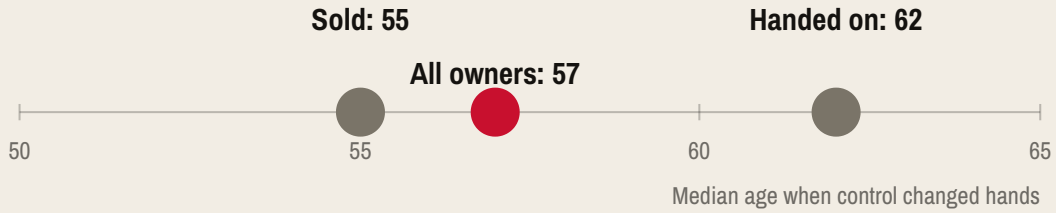
Across Europe's large companies the average departing chief executive in 2025 was 59. That tells us when they left, not why. [2026-x12]

Company owners let go at about the same age. The average owner of a substantial British company let go at 57. Owners who sold went at 55. Owners who handed on to another person went at 62. These are changes in control, not retirement dates. [2026-own3] [2026-own5]

FIGURE 2

WHEN OWNERS LET GO

Median age at which a person ceased to control a substantial British company



WHO AND WHEN	Substantial British companies where an identifiable person ceased to hold control. Register as at 28 September 2026.
SOURCE	Magnus Wood, own count from Companies House data · [2026-own3], [2026-own5]
CAVEAT	These are changes in control, not retirement dates. Counted from a second pull of the register, 28 September.

What these counts cannot show. They count positions, not people; one person can control several companies. A controlling position is ownership or control, not always running the company day to day. Companies with shares on a regulated market are outside the register, and a company owned through another company reports that company, not a person.

The people running companies are the same age as the people struggling to get back into work.

"One generation, trusted to run the business, is now finding it hard to get hired by one."

What is happening to the people after the exit is the question the rest of this report asks.

OUT OF WORK ISN'T THE SAME AS FINISHED

People over fifty who are out of work aren't one group. There are at least four kinds of person. Someone made redundant who is still applying. Someone who stopped after being turned down again and again. Someone whose health or caring means they need a different kind of job. And someone who retired because they wanted to. Only the last has chosen to stop.

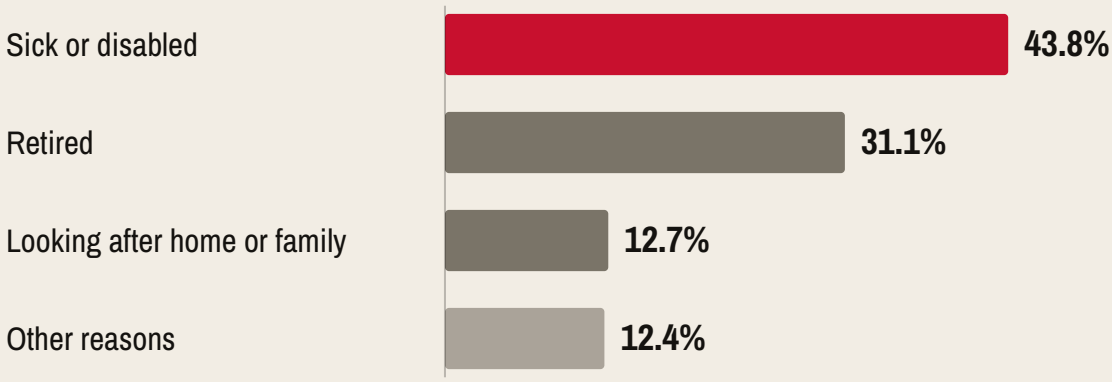
The official figures split them with two words. Unemployed means you have no work, you're looking, and you could start. Economically inactive means you're not in work, and either not looking or not able to start. It doesn't mean you don't want work.

Between April and June 2026, 3.4 million people aged 50 to 64 were economically inactive: 22.2% of men and 29.0% of women. The main reasons they gave were sickness or disability (43.8%), retirement (31.1%) and looking after home or family (12.7%). Half had left their last job five or more years before. *DWP, September 2026.*

FIGURE 3

WHY 3.4 MILLION 50 TO 64 YEAR OLDS ARE NOT LOOKING FOR WORK

Main reason given for economic inactivity



WHO AND WHEN	UK, economically inactive people aged 50 to 64. April to June 2026.
SOURCE	DWP, September 2026 · [2026-dwp1]
CAVEAT	Half had left their last job five or more years before.

866,000 people aged 50 to 64 were looking for work, or not looking but wanting it. 585,000 of them were in the second group, and 62.2% of those said sickness or disability was the reason. We can't say they all gave up after rejection. The figures don't show that. They do show that the unemployment count misses most of the people who want to come back. *DWP, September 2026.*

FIGURE 4

OUT OF WORK AND NOT LOOKING

Economically inactive, as a share of the age group



WHO AND WHEN	UK, all people in the age band. April to June 2026.
SOURCE	DWP, September 2026 · [2026-ev2]
CAVEAT	Sickness and disability, retirement and caring each explain part of it, and need telling apart.

What you have matters. In the poorest third of 55 to 64 year olds in England, 18% of men and 22% of women are out of work through permanent sickness or disability. In the middle and top thirds it's under 5%. The wealthiest are more likely to have retired early on their own pensions. Leaving early can mean you could afford to. Or that you couldn't carry on. [2025-ev1]

So do qualifications. 46.0% of 50 to 64 year olds with no qualifications are in work, against 80.5% of those with a degree. *DWP, September 2026.*

So does where you live. Inactivity at 50 to 64 runs from 21.2% in the South East to 30.2% in the North East. *DWP, September 2026.*

FIGURE 5

WHERE YOU LIVE MATTERS

Economically inactive, aged 50 to 64, share of the age group



WHO AND WHEN	UK nations, and the highest and lowest English regions. April to June 2026.
SOURCE	DWP, September 2026 · [2026-dwp1]
CAVEAT	Within England the range runs from 21.2% in the South East to 30.2% in the North East.

Please don't add these figures together into a count of people denied work. This report follows the first three people: they want to work, and getting back is hard.

AFTER THE EXIT

When the job ends, the first question is money. We can be 54 and thirteen years from a State Pension. Then the other questions arrive. Can I get back to the level I left? Will I earn less? Here's what the evidence says about getting back in, and what it costs.

Most didn't choose to go. Just over half of people who left their last job in their fifties and early sixties left for reasons the ILC classes as involuntary: ill health, caring or redundancy. [2026-ev1] Redundancy itself no longer falls hardest on the over-fifties. It did through the 2010s, at up to 1.43 times the rate of 35 to 49 year olds. In 2026 the highest rate is among 35 to 49 year olds. [2019-r1]

> *"Money matters and it's nearly absent."*

> *"We can be 54 and thirteen years from a State Pension."*

Getting back takes longer. Between 1998 and 2020, fewer than two in three over-fifties who lost a job were back in work within six months. For under-fifties it was around three in four. [2021-r2] A different measure, the share of the unemployed who have been out of work for a year or more, shows a gap that has since closed. In 2023, 37.5% of unemployed 50 to 64 year olds had been out of work for a year or more, against 21.0% of unemployed 35 to 49 year olds. By 2026 it was 29.8% against 29.1%. But those figures only count people still looking. They can't see those who stopped, or those who went back to less. [2023-r1]

And it costs. Those who did get back were paid 9.5% less an hour on average. [2021-r2] That's nearly a tenth off the hourly rate, at the age most of us expected to be earning our most. It's the clearest British figure I found for what getting back in costs.

FIGURE 6

GETTING BACK, AND WHAT IT COSTS

People who lost a job and found another, by age

Fewer than 2 in 3

over-fifties back in work within six months

Around 3 in 4

under-fifties back in work within six months

9.5%

less an hour, on average, for over-fifties who got back

WHO AND WHEN	UK, people who became unemployed, by age. 1998 to 2020.
SOURCE	Resolution Foundation, A U-shaped crisis, April 2021 · [2021-r2]
CAVEAT	Twenty-two years of hourly earnings data. The source gives the return rates in these terms, not as exact figures.

The return has to fit the life. In February 2022, 58% of people in their fifties who had left work since the pandemic began said they'd consider going back. Flexible hours, good pay and working from home were what would bring them back. [2022-ev1] Support doesn't guarantee it. On the government's Work and Health Programme, 20% of people aged 60 and over got a job outcome within two years, against 38% of 18 to 24 year olds. A job outcome means more than starting a job: it needs an earnings threshold or a spell of self-employment. DWP warns the groups differ in health and time out of work, so the gap isn't a measure of age alone. *DWP, May 2026.*

Getting another job matters. So does what it pays, and whether you can keep it up. The evidence says much more about whether people are back in work than about the work they're back in. There's no official count of whether people return at the level they left. [absence-r4]

What America counts. Every two years the United States asks people what happened after they lost a job they'd held for three years or more. It is the question Britain doesn't ask, so it is the closest thing to an answer. The figures are in the chart. I couldn't find anything like it in Britain. *US Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2026.* [absence-r6]

Additional evidence, not used in the body. Payroll data: in the year to July 2026, payrolled employees aged 50 to 64 fell by 81,000 and those aged 35 to 49 rose by 54,000 (HMRC, via DWP, September 2026); age-band totals move as people age in and out, so these are not job losses. Return intentions: by August 2022, 86% of leavers aged 50 to 54 said they would consider going back; this was a different sample from February, so it does not show a rise. *ONS, Reasons for workers aged over 50 years leaving employment, wave 2, 27 September 2022.*

None of these figures can say how much of the difficulty is age discrimination. For that, you have to look at what happens when employers choose whom to interview.

WHERE AGE DISCRIMINATION IS SHOWN

The recruiter said overqualified. You never find out what they meant.

A single rejection rarely tells you why. Most of what we know about ageism in hiring is what people believe happened to them. That matters. It isn't proof. A field experiment gets closer. It sends matched applications to real jobs and watches who gets invited.

More experience, fewer interviews. In 2017 and 2018 researchers sent pairs of applications to 190 restaurant, café and sales jobs in England. One applicant was a white British man of 28, with 9 years' experience in the work. The other was a white British man of 50, with 31 years'. Both were in work. The 28-year-old was invited to interview by 67 employers and the 50-year-old by 37: 35.3% against 19.5%, a gap of 15.8 points. In 34 jobs only the younger man was asked in. In 4, only the older. [2022-ev2]

> *"The older applicant had more than three times the experience. Employers invited him to just over half as many interviews."*

FIGURE 8

MORE EXPERIENCE, FEWER INTERVIEWS

Share of 190 employers who invited each applicant to interview



WHO AND WHEN	Matched applications, two white British men both in work, to restaurant, café and sales jobs in England. Fieldwork 2017 to 2018.
SOURCE	Drydakis, Paraskevopoulou and Bozani, IZA DP 15567 (2022) and Employee Relations (2023) · [2022-ev2]
CAVEAT	In 34 jobs only the younger man was invited. In 4, only the older. Junior roles only, before the pandemic.

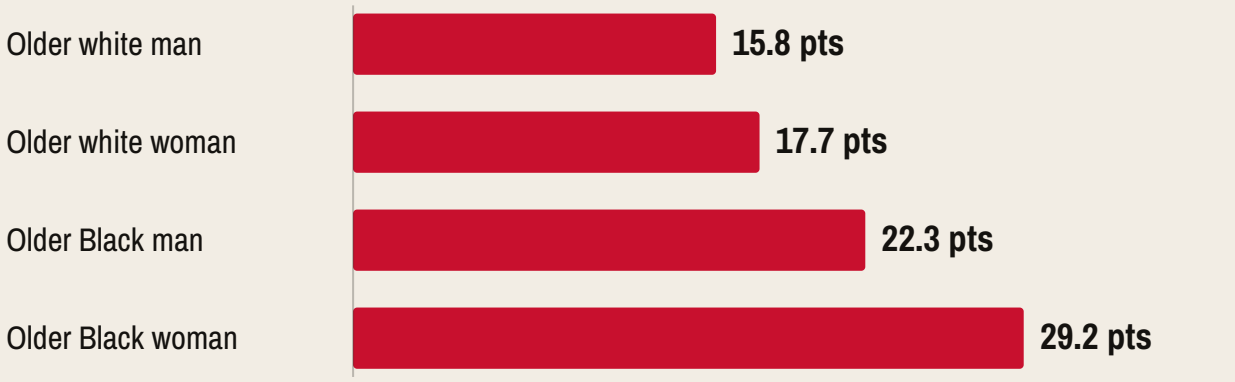
The same study also tested older women and older Black applicants against the young white man. The gap grew to 17.7 points for older white women, 22.3 for older Black men and 29.2 for older Black women. These change age together with sex or race, so they aren't age effects on their own.

What it shows: age changed how employers responded, in the jobs tested. *What it can't tell us:* anything about senior or managerial hiring, or what happens if you're out of work when you apply. I couldn't find a British test of either. [absence-r5] And the fieldwork was done before the pandemic.

FIGURE 9

FEWER INTERVIEWS THAN THE 28-YEAR-OLD WHITE MAN

Gap in percentage points, by the older applicant's sex and race. All older applicants aged 50, same 190 jobs.



WHO AND WHEN	All older applicants aged 50, same 190 jobs. Fieldwork 2017 to 2018.
SOURCE	Drydakis, Paraskevopoulou and Bozani, 2022 and 2023 · [2022-ev2]
CAVEAT	These combine age with sex or race, so they are not age effects on their own.

What employers say. In 2024, Totaljobs reported that employers consider 57 "too old" to hire. In its survey of 1,000 HR decision-makers, 59% admitted making assumptions based on age. 42% had felt pressure from colleagues to hire someone younger. *Totaljobs with Professor Sarah Vickerstaff, The Age Advantage, October 2024.*

What jobseekers say. In the same 2024 research, one in seven over-fifties said they'd been turned down for a job because of their age. 22% had left their age off a CV. A quarter had hesitated to apply at all, rising to 42% of Black workers. *Totaljobs, October 2024.*

Each of these shows something different. The experiment measures what employers did. The employer survey shows what they admit to. The jobseekers show what people believe, and how it changes what they do. None of it says how many unsuccessful searches age explains.

The person applying knows what they sent and what came back. They rarely see the decision on the other side.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR YOU?

The figures count people. They don't tell us what it felt like when the job ended, how the search went, or what it took to start again.

The next edition of this report will include accounts from people living this chapter. We'll agree the words and how you're identified with you before anything is published.

If this is your story, tell us through Gen X Stories.

SOME OF US WANTED TO LEAVE

For some of us, leaving work is the point of having worked. We saved, paid into a pension, and can have our time back. We don't want another job.

More than half the rise in 50 to 69 year olds leaving work between 2020 and 2022 was people retiring, and they were relatively well off. *Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2022.* The wealthiest are more likely to retire early on their own pensions. [2025-ev1] In February 2022, 79% of 50 to 70 year olds who had left work said none of the changes on a list would bring them back. That's a different group from the 58% in section 3, asked a different question. *ONS, Over 50s Lifestyle Study, March 2022.*

Other figures cut against the simple story too. Unemployment at 50 to 64 is no higher than at 35 to 49. The long-term gap of 2023 has closed. Redundancy no longer falls hardest on the over-fifties. [2026-ev2] [2023-r1] [2019-r1] And the fall in older people's employment after the pandemic may partly be a problem with the survey. Payroll data and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing didn't show it, and the survey's response rate fell to 13% in 2023. [2023-ev1]

FIGURE 10

OUT OF WORK AND LOOKING FOR IT

Unemployed, as a share of everyone working or looking for work



WHO AND WHEN	UK, economically active people, by age band. April to June 2026.
SOURCE	DWP, Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over, September 2026 · [2026-ev2]
CAVEAT	The two rates have tracked each other since 2014.

So what's left standing? People in their fifties are about as likely to be unemployed as people in their forties. Far more of them are inactive, for reasons that include health, caring, retirement and giving up looking, and those need telling apart. And where age has been tested in hiring, it changed who got the interview. How far that last finding explains the inactivity is the question this evidence can't yet answer.

WHAT HAPPENS TO US NEXT?

One gap stopped me.

The Office for National Statistics publishes a table called "Redundancies by industry, age, sex and re-employment rates". I opened the September 2026 edition. Seven sheets. Not one has a re-employment rate. [absence-r4]

> *"The ONS table promises re-employment rates in its title. I opened all seven sheets. They weren't there."*

The title promised the part I wanted to understand: what happens after the job ends.

There is British research on that. Some of it is in this report. But it's scattered, often years old, and leaves most of the return unexplained. If we lose a job at 54, how long will it take to find another? How many applications? Will we earn what we earned before? Will anyone want the experience we spent thirty years building? I couldn't find a current national picture that answers those questions.

Back in work, but back to what? Getting back can mean the same level. It can mean fewer hours by choice, less pay because that was the only offer, or temporary work while the search goes on. A figure that says someone is employed again can't tell you which. There's no official series on whether people return at the level they left, and I couldn't find a measured figure, by age, for how many applications it takes. [absence-r4] [absence-r7]

At the top it's the same. A chief executive's appointment is announced, and so is the exit. I couldn't find a British study that follows what comes after. [absence-2]

> *"Getting another job tells us someone is earning again. It doesn't tell us how much of their working life they've recovered."*

Does our experience get us through the door? The British hiring experiments tested sales and hospitality jobs, with applicants who were in work. They can't tell us what happens to a fifty-year-old manager applying after redundancy. [absence-r5]

What else is missing. The United States asks every two years what happened after people lost a long-held job. I couldn't find a British equivalent. [absence-r6] There's been no national count since 2023 of people going back to work after retiring. [absence-r1] And until my count in section 1, I couldn't find a published breakdown of the age of the people running British companies. [absence-r3]

All 23 gaps are listed on The Evidence.

What would change it.

1. The ONS publishes the re-employment rates its table promises, or renames the table.
2. The Labour Force Survey adds a question for people who have lost a long-held job: are they back in work, and at what level and pay?
3. Someone runs a British hiring experiment for managerial and professional jobs, including candidates who are out of work.

CRAZY PAVING, AGAIN

"There is no such thing as a career path – it's crazy paving and you lay it yourself." That was 1997. We did.

Now some of us are doing it again. With more experience, more responsibilities, and a clearer idea of what we need from work. Perhaps also with less money and time to get it wrong.

> *"We were told to lay our own path. Now some of us are laying it again, with less money and less time to get it wrong."*

There may still be a substantial working life ahead. The average age of leaving the labour market has reached 65.8 for men and 65.1 for women, the highest recorded in the series. At 65, 46.6% of people are employed, compared with 28.2% ten years earlier. [2026-dwp1] *DWP, September 2026.*

Those figures don't tell us whether people are working longer because they want to or because they need to. But they make the years after fifty difficult to dismiss as the closing stretch.

The question is what kind of work those years can hold.

For some of us, the aim is another job: a salary, colleagues, somewhere to put our experience to use. Others want fewer hours or work that fits around health and family. Some are building a business or earning through several pieces of work.

Self-employment already accounts for 17.1% of working people aged 50 to 64, compared with 13.1% of those aged 35 to 49. The proportion of employed 50 to 64 year olds working part-time has also risen over the past five years. *DWP, September 2026.*

Neither is automatically a success story. Working for yourself can bring freedom and uncertainty in the same week. Fewer hours can be a choice, or all that is available. A new way of working may fit our lives better and still leave us earning less.

I am living some of this myself. I want to understand what makes it possible to keep going: where the first paid work comes from, which experience proves useful, what has to be learned, and how long it takes to earn enough.

Those are the stories Gen X at Work will follow next. The people who found another job. Those who changed direction. Those who built something of their own. And those still trying to make it work.

We should not have to reinvent ourselves to escape unfair treatment. Nor should the difficulty of getting hired define everything that remains possible.

If you are living this chapter, tell us through Gen X Stories. You do not need a finished success story. What you are trying, what it costs and what you are learning belong in the account too.

The next stones are ours to lay. We should be honest about how heavy some of them are.

THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THIS REPORT

This report draws on Gen X at Work in November 2026. The site holds far more, and keeps growing.

The Years That Made Us. What happened to our generation, year by year, from 1976 to now. Over 300 individual data points, from our first jobs to the top of business and out the other side.

The Evidence. The same entries with the working shown. Each one names its source, quotes it and links to it. Over 300 have been checked against the original. Where the evidence ought to exist and doesn't, I've listed that too: 22 gaps so far.

The counts. I took the whole Companies House register and counted the age of every individual recorded as controlling an active British company. That's 5,241,049 controlling positions, with no sampling. I couldn't find it published anywhere else.

Crazy Paving. My research on Britain's Gen X leaders, from the 1997 advice to lay your own path to the people running British business now.

The newsroom. New evidence as it's published, filed under the four stories this report follows.

Gen X Stories. Accounts from people living it. If this is your story, add yours.

All of it is at genxatwork.com.

THE FOUR STORIES THE EVIDENCE KEEPS TELLING

1. **We are the generation running British businesses.**
2. **Nobody told us what the top is really like.**
3. **Losing the job is not the unusual part. Getting back in is.**
4. **What comes next is ours to invent.**

This report has followed the third story, because that is where the evidence is thinnest and the questions are most urgent. The other three frame it.

BEGIN THE CONVERSATION

If you're writing about this. Every figure here has its source attached. Each chart has a download link beside it. You can use it with this citation: *Magnus Wood, In Their Fifties. Trusted to Run It. Struggling to Get Back In. Gen X at Work, first edition, November 2026*. The images and the method are on the page for journalists: genxatwork.com/press

If this is your story. Still leading a business. Looking for the next job. Working out what comes after. What have you kept from your working life? Send a photo, a voice note or a line to Gen X Stories on WhatsApp or at genxatwork.com/go-on-the-record. You don't need to have it all worked out.

If you want to talk. magnus@genxatwork.com

CLAIM REGISTER, METHOD AND CONTACT

Every figure here is either an entry on The Evidence, with its source opened and quoted, or a named official publication. To open an entry, add its ID to genxatwork.com/the-evidence/timeline/?e=

ID	CLAIM	SOURCE
2026-own1	Median controller 47; 60 in substantial companies	Own count, Companies House, 27 Sep 2026
2026-own2	38.6% of controllers born 1965 to 1980	Own count, Companies House, 27 Sep 2026
2026-own3	Median owner lets go at 57	Own count, Companies House, 28 Sep 2026
2026-own5	Sellers go at 55, hand-ons at 62	Own count, Companies House, 28 Sep 2026
2025-r5	Average chief executive of the 150 largest listed companies born 1969 (average age 56.2)	Spencer Stuart, UK Board Index 2025
2026-x12	Departing chief executive averages 59	Spencer Stuart, CEO Transitions in Europe 2025
2025-x11	7% of former chief executives took another	Spencer Stuart, 2025 survey of chief executives
2025-ev1	Poorest third out sick; wealthiest retire	IFS, Nov 2025
2019-r1	Redundancy fell hardest on over-fifties through the 2010s; not in 2026	ONS, RED02
2023-r1	Long-term unemployment gap, 2023 and 2026	DWP, Sep 2023 and Sep 2026
2026-ev1	Just over half left involuntarily	ILC, Sep 2026
2021-r2	9.5% lower pay on return, UK, 1998 to 2020	Resolution Foundation, Apr 2021
2022-ev1	58% of 50s leavers would consider returning, Feb 2022	ONS, Mar 2022
2022-ev2	34 to 4; 35.3% against 19.5%, England, 2017 to 2018	Drydakis, Paraskevopoulou and Bozani, 2022 and 2023
2023-ev1	Main Labour Force Survey estimates suspended, 2023	IFS, Nov 2025
2026-ev2	Unemployment 2.9% against 3.0%, UK, Apr to Jun 2026	DWP, Sep 2026

ID	CLAIM	SOURCE
2026-dwp1	Exit age at a record; reasons for inactivity; nations and regions	DWP, Sep 2026

Absence IDs (absence-2, absence-r1, r3 to r7) are listed under "What is not here" on The Evidence.

Publications cited directly. DWP, Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over, September 2026. DWP, Work and Health Programme statistics to February 2026, Figure 11. ONS, RED02, September 2026. ONS, Over 50s Lifestyle Study, March 2022. Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2022. US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Worker Displacement 2023 to 2025, August 2026. Totaljobs with Professor Sarah Vickerstaff, The Age Advantage, October 2024. Spencer Stuart, UK Board Index 2025.

Who made this. I'm not a researcher and this isn't a study. It's a record, built from published sources with the sources attached, so you can check it or disagree with it. It brings together published evidence and adds two counts of my own. Every entry this report uses has been checked against its original.

How reliable the official figures are. Most UK figures on the over-fifties come from the Labour Force Survey. Its response rate collapsed in 2023 and has partly recovered. The ONS advises caution on changes over time and on detailed breakdowns. Where a figure rests on a small group, I say so.

> *"The sources sit beside the figures. Check them, and tell me what I've missed."*

Age bands. Generation X was born between 1965 and 1980, so was 46 to 61 in 2026. Most official data uses 50 to 64. I use whichever band each source used and never relabel it.

The counts. Method, caveats and data files for both Companies House counts are on The Evidence. Where the text says average for these counts, it means the median. Anyone can repeat them from the free files at download.companieshouse.gov.uk.

Corrections. If something here is wrong, tell me through the correction link on The Evidence. I'll change it and show the date of the change.

Contact. Magnus Wood, magnus@genxatwork.com. Published 1 November 2026.

FOR JOURNALISTS

NOTES TO EDITORS

IN ONE PARAGRAPH

Generation X is running British business, and some of the same generation, in their fifties and sixties, are finding it hard to get back into work once the job ends. *In Their Fifties. Trusted to Run It. Struggling to Get Back In.* Published by Gen X at Work, it brings the evidence together: who leaves and why, how long getting back takes, what it costs, and where age changes who gets the interview. Gen X at Work was founded by Magnus Wood. The report draws on over 300 individual data points and an original count of every individual controlling position recorded against an active British company.

THE FINDING

THREE TIMES THE EXPERIENCE. HALF THE INTERVIEWS.

In a field experiment in England, a 50-year-old applicant with 31 years' experience was invited to interview by 19.5% of employers. A 28-year-old with 9 years' experience was invited by 35.3%. Field experiment, 190 restaurant, café and sales jobs, England, fieldwork 2017 to 2018. [2022-ev2]

FIVE FIGURES

1. 2.9% of economically active people aged 50 to 64 are unemployed, against 3.0% at 35 to 49. UK, April to June 2026. *DWP.* [2026-ev2]
2. 25.7% of people aged 50 to 64 are economically inactive, against 12.3% at 35 to 49. UK, April to June 2026. *DWP.* [2026-ev2]
3. Just over half of people who left their last job in their fifties and early sixties left for reasons classed as involuntary: ill health, caring or redundancy. *ILC, September 2026.* [2026-ev1]
4. In 34 of 190 jobs only the 28-year-old applicant was invited to interview. In 4, only the 50-year-old. England, 2017 to 2018. *Drydakis, Paraskevopoulou and Bozani.* [2022-ev2]
5. Over-fifties who lost a job and found another between 1998 and 2020 came back on hourly pay 9.5% lower on average. *Resolution Foundation, 2021.* [2021-r2]

QUOTES · MAGNUS WOOD, FOUNDER OF GEN X AT WORK, SAID:

"One generation, trusted to run the business, is now finding it hard to get hired by one."

"Leaving my last role as a Chief Marketing Officer meant discovering how much of my identity had become attached to the title."

"Money matters and it's nearly absent."

"We can be 54 and thirteen years from a State Pension."

"The older applicant had more than three times the experience. Employers invited him to just over half as many interviews."

"The ONS table promises re-employment rates in its title. I opened all seven sheets. They weren't there."

"Getting another job tells us someone is earning again. It doesn't tell us how much of their working life they've recovered."

"We were told to lay our own path. Now some of us are laying it again, with less money and less time to get it wrong."

"The sources sit beside the figures. Check them, and tell me what I've missed."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Magnus Wood is the founder of Gen X at Work and Wild Leadership. Three times at the top of a business. Left three times, not always when he chose. He has spent more than thirty years inside large companies and startups, and has led at board level in private equity-backed businesses, where capital has a clock and alignment failures have consequences. Born in Scotland, he has spent most of his adult life in London and lives in Sevenoaks, Kent. He writes this report as one of the people in it, and will talk about all three exits, including the ones he did not choose. Portraits, the method and the four stories: genxatwork.com/press

METHOD

Every figure is either an entry on The Evidence at genxatwork.com, with its source opened and quoted, or a named official publication. The two Companies House counts are the author's own and can be repeated from the free register files. The report is about people born 1965 to 1980. Most official data uses 50 to 64, which leaves out the youngest of the generation and includes some older. The report uses the age band each source used and never relabels it. Every entry it uses has been checked against its original.

CITATION

Magnus Wood, In Their Fifties. Trusted to Run It. Struggling to Get Back In. Gen X at Work, first edition, November 2026. Charts may be used with this citation and carry direct download links.

CONTACT

magnus@genxatwork.com

GEN X AT WORK

In Their Fifties. Trusted to Run It. Struggling to Get Back In.

Magnus Wood, In Their Fifties. Trusted to Run It. Struggling to Get Back In. Gen X at Work, first edition, November 2026

GENXATWORK.COM