

Source: The Gazette

Number of independent consultants on steady rise

Baby boomers leading the trend. More workers willing to trade full-time jobs for freedom of being their own boss: study

DEREK SANKEY, Canwest News Service

Published: Wednesday, March 26

Casey Plaizier couldn't imagine losing the equivalent of a full work day every week stuck commuting on the gridlocked streets of Calgary. Like many self-employed consultants, he decided several years ago to work for himself out of his home office.

The human resources consultant and partner with Greenhill Consulting Group in Calgary is part of a trend toward leaving a steady paycheque to work as consultant, contract worker and in other self-employed roles, according to new data.

The Canadian consulting market is growing at a rate of 5.5 per cent annually and rising, a study commissioned by the Canadian Association of Management Consultants (CMC-Canada) shows.

"It gives you a tremendous amount of flexibility," Plaizier said. "Once people make the move from being an employee to the consulting side and they get a taste of it ... they realize this is for real."

No office politics, the ability to work where and when you want, unlimited ability to balance work and personal life, potentially lucrative contracts - these are all benefits that lured Plaizier to the world of consulting several years ago.

Another study found baby boomers are leading the trend, but they're not alone. More workers appear willing to trade in their full-time jobs for the uncertainty - and freedom - that goes along with being your own boss.

A recent Strategic Counsel survey confirms the appeal of the full-time job scenario is losing ground to new career options, like the "project professional," who does temporary contracts in-house.

Sixty-two per cent of boomers earning more than \$80,000 a year choose project professional or self-employment as the most appealing work scenario, vs. 37 per cent who choose full-time employment.

"The desire for work-life balance and new career experiences has led many professionals to consider this career alternative," said Anne Bell, managing director of Resources Global

Professionals' Canadian operations. "It provides them with the freedom to have a stimulating professional life and a complete personal life."

"It's not just baby boomers," said Plaizier, adding that he knows individuals who range from 30 to 45 years old who are making the switch to self-employment, in one form or another.

Heather Osler, president of CMC-Canada, said the number of mid-size management consultancies is also rising and Canada is seeing a "dramatic surge," with the leading business advisory firms competing directly with the well-known strategy consulting firms.

"The robust market is further supported by the entrepreneurial activity of niche and boutique management consulting firms," Osler said.

Demand for services in the private and public sectors is outpacing global market growth rates, according to the CMC-Canada study, while experienced consultants generally offer a more cost-competitive alternative to clients.

The rising number of self-employed contract workers and consultants, along with those who form strategic partnerships, has created a new dynamic for managers.

While it's a lifestyle that offers a lot of advantages, the most obvious drawback is the lack of a steady paycheck and benefits. You also have to remember that although you make your own schedule, you always have to be aware of new opportunities to sell yourself.

"True consultants' minds are always working," Plaizier said.

In other words, you reap only what you sow.