

## The Complications of More Leisure Time

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Linda Nazareth, author of *The Leisure Economy*.

Q. You write about the arrival of a period you call “the leisure economy.” The term will strike many as an object of fantasy, especially since you set it up as a contrast to the current “time-crunch economy” plaguing so many of us today. In simple terms, can you define the leisure economy and explain why you believe we are on its doorstep?

A. I see us moving to a society where more people have more time. Right now, baby boomers and people a little younger are working flat out and driving their kids everywhere, and they are proud of it. If someone asks you how you are, you have to say, “I’m really busy.” I argue that the boomers are the most competitive generation we’ve ever seen and they have made it fashionable to be busy. They always had to compete with each other because there are so many of them. And because they have dominated everything, they have given us the time-crunch economy.

But we now have an aging society. And as people move out of the time-crunch years — the 30s and 40s when you have the most demands on your time and the least free time — you have a kind of forced leisure. There will be lots of them, and they will have what will seem — to them — to be lots of time, which will give us the first part of the leisure economy.

Q. In many ways, this is about demographics, and a good chunk of your thesis is that as the 77 million baby boomers age, they will elevate the status of leisure, much as they elevated the status of work-related accomplishments and pretty much anything else they experienced. But you say it’s not just the boomers, but also Gen Y, another mammoth-size generation. Tell us about that.

A. Gen Y is the generation born since the late 1970s, the oldest of whom are now in their 20s. It’s a generation that knows technology, knows they can multitask and has a lot of interests since they were brought up all kinds of activities, whether hockey, gymnastics, music or whatever. They are already putting demands on corporations, and when they have their families they will make even more demands. And what they want most of all is time. And because the boomers will be retiring, quite a lot of them will get a yes when they ask for those things. Part-time work has really been considered lower status. You don’t really see it for

professionals all that often. I am eager to see whether this generation makes it much more widespread.

Q. Early in the book, you make the point that not everyone will be a part of the leisure economy (just as you point out that not everyone has been a part of the time-crunch economy). This all seems very related to class. Can you talk a bit about how you see these distinctions playing out?

A. We've seen a huge divide in North America, with the rich getting richer and not everyone getting part of that growth. And it is not just the super rich. It is also professionals getting more. However, those with a less elite education level are finding it hard to make any gains. So I think the next split will be the leisure split. We are already seeing it among the 55-to-64-year olds who are not able to retire staying in the labor force longer than they want. And I think we'll be seeing more of that with the leisure haves being able to leave full-time work if they want, to dabble at work and other things and the have-nots being unable to get the leisure. The same is true for younger households. There will be an appetite in families to have one parent home for a time (male or female), but not everyone will be able to make that happen.

Q. So what will the leisure economy feel like for those in the have-not category?

A. We'll see a bit of leisure envy. You'll get people who will take time by retiring on smaller incomes. They will learn to do things for themselves they have always paid for. They will cook, and they will stop buying presliced carrots. They will have more time and less money. Some of the younger have-nots will want time out whether with their kids or not, but they will not all be well positioned for that. Some have huge college debts. So it's a bit of a lottery. And it's a big difference what field you choose, what city you live in and how much flexibility you have to drop out or make any kinds of demands for part-time work. Some will have the magic bullet of parents or grandparents who will write a check to get them started. All of this will have implications for both individuals and for the economy.

Q. You also make predictions on various industries or sectors that will be winners (education, crafts and hobbies, fitness and sports, gambling and travel). What will some of the losers be and why?

A. In the time-crunch economy, people have had very little time and a relatively large amount of money. So they have paid for convenience — food that has been prepped, drive through everything, people to fix their houses and walk their dogs. In the leisure economy, you will have a group that has more time on their hands, and more importantly a sub group that has time on their hands and less money than they had before. So they'll shy away from restaurants because they have time to cook and they are trying to budget. It just will not make sense to do things like order in every Friday, and they really will not need to. So I see food services — and services in general — having to readjust.

Q. You make some interesting predictions on businesses and services that will thrive in a leisure economy. To a group of drugstore operators you asked: "What if people had time to hang around for longer than it takes to fill a prescription? Are you offering services that would make people linger?" You also suggest that restaurants should consider offering cooking classes and seminars for those who have the time and disposable income to enjoy those. What other kinds of things should we expect to see?

A. Whenever I speak, I tell organizations or businesses to ask themselves some questions. What if people had more time? Would they stay at the gym longer to go

to the juice bar or buy sessions with the trainer? Would they order fondue at a restaurant if they weren't in a rush? Would they stay in the library longer, and what would they want to do with that time? To government groups, I say, would people look more critically at your policies and lobby more? And what if workers started telling employers that they wanted to work but not for 60 or 40 hours a week? What would that change?

Q. So how can individuals best position themselves to take part in the leisure economy?

A. Put it into your investment portfolio. Choose companies that are well-placed to profit from the leisure economy. It could be choosing a company that has figured out how not to lose all its best workers to retirement all at once without bringing in others. If being a part of the leisure economy is important to you, think about it and start planning now for it. I don't just mean this for people nearing retirement. Young people should be thinking about how they will get that little time out they are looking for. It might mean saving more earlier, or spending less. Think about your life plan. If time is important to you, then plan that as much as you plan buying a house or financing your retirement.

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