

Retire at 62? Not these men

Jewellery firm trio see work as a way to pass time and stay active

BY SUE-ANN CHIA

WELL into their 70s, these three men are still going strong in their jobs.

Retire? Not now, they say.

The trio – Mr Lai Kay Pak, Mr Kuan Ting Chee and Mr Chiang Keng Hong – are part of a small but growing group of older folk who want to keep on working.

Their unrelenting desire embodies the spirit highlighted by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday at a seminar on reinventing retirement.

“They need to see work as an important avenue to contribute, stay active and learn new things,” he said.

“But they need to be ready to adjust to different responsibilities, and possibly lighter work and less pay, and this is understandably harder to accept.”

The official retirement age is 62, and yet by that age, only six out of 10 men are still working, said PM Lee. The rest have already retired. Even fewer women work till 62 because most have stopped much earlier to raise their families.

Not this trio.

They are long-time employees of



Although they are well into their 70s, (from left) Mr Kuan Ting Chee, Mr Chiang Keng Hong and Mr Lai Kay Pak have no intention of retiring any time soon. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

On Cheong Jewellery, where Mr Lai and Mr Kuan, both 73, are champion salesmen at its two Chinatown outlets.

They have a regular base of customers which keeps expanding over the years as customers recommend their family members and friends to them.

“Sometimes, we even see the fourth generation, our customers’ great-

grandchildren, come to buy from us,” said Mr Kuan in Mandarin.

With their sales talent, both men, who have been with the firm for 57 years, were promoted from sales executive to operations manager last year.

They still sell jewellery, but take on the extra role of mentoring their younger colleagues.

“A lot of young people don’t like such jobs as the long hours mean they can’t *pak tor*,” said Mr Lai with a laugh, using the Hokkien term for dating.

As for Mr Chiang, 75, he has been a craftsman at the company for more than 40 years. He spends most of his time repairing jewellery pieces and polishing diamonds.

He will keep at it until he cannot see the intricate design of the jewellery clearly, he said.

Unlike most companies, On Cheong Jewellery has no retirement policy. Employees work till they wish to stop.

For many, there does not seem to be an end date. Among the 42 staff, 11 are older than 62. The oldest is a 90-year-old director. The rest are sales staff or craftsmen.

“We can depend on the older workers as they are reliable, and have a lot of experience and knowledge of the business,” said its finance and administration manager Juliana Yeong, 51.

The three men have enough retirement savings and their children are all grown-up.

In fact, Mr Lai said his children had asked him to retire.

As for Mr Kuan, he said: “If I retire, I’ll be bored at home.”

Added Mr Chiang: “Working helps pass the time. If I can, I will work for a few more years.”

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