

Overcoming the Barriers associated with Job Hunting as a Mature Age Worker

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We are constantly bombarded with the fact that Australia currently has an ageing workforce. Statistics are provided left, right and centre about the number of Australian's who will be over the age of 55 in 10 years time, or the number of Australian's in the workforce who are currently over the age of 45. We also constantly read information in the press about the value that Mature Age workers can bring to the employment market.

Given the high level of awareness surrounding this, it is surprising that there is little discussion about the effect job hunting at a 'mature age' can have on an individual. Seeking a new role can be a challenging and daunting task at any age and unfortunately this can be even more so for the 'mature worker' where age can be perceived to be a barrier.

There is no doubt that mature age workers have a lot to offer businesses due to their work and life experience, skills and knowledge. A harsh reality however is that biases and perceptions about the employability of a mature age individual does exist and in some case can stand in the way of securing new employment.

What becomes an important, if not vital, part of the job search process therefore is the way one approaches their job hunt. Below you will find some tips and techniques to assist you in putting your best foot forward in order to overcome the barriers associated with job hunting when you are a 'mature age' job seeker.

- Confidence and Belief in Yourself

Stay positive. Believe in yourself and your abilities. Think back through your work history and focus on the obstacles you had to overcome, the new skills you had to develop, the challenges you were faced with. Thinking about these will assist you in developing your confidence in your ability.

Interestingly, research indicates that employers believe mature age workers bring valuable skills and life / work experiences to the organisation, are more loyal, productive and motivated, and also relate well to older customers!

When you are speaking to people your confidence and belief in yourself does come through in everything you say. Maintaining a high level of confidence therefore will only work in your favour.

- Persistence

Unfortunately the job search process inevitably involves knock-backs and disappointments. Whilst it may not seem as though you are going to get anywhere, persistence and perseverance can pay off. Try to remain committed and enthusiastic about your job search, as once again, these traits come through when you are speaking to people.

- Be Realistic

Do you need full time employment? Can you consider 'portfolio employment'? Many people today have a number of part time jobs at one time, this is known as Portfolio employment. Think outside the square when looking for your next role.

- Conduct a 'Skills Audit'

Think about the skills you have developed over your working career. Which skills do you enjoy using, which skills are you good at using? Try not to focus on your past job or position titles... don't pigeon hole yourself. What skills do you want to be using? What skills would you like to develop? Research different ways that you can develop these skills. For example can you attend the local TAFE or Community Centre to do a short course, or can you volunteer your time in an organisation which will enable you to develop the specific skill? (This will also assist you with maintaining a high confidence level!).

- Try Marketing Yourself Directly to Companies

A concept which is quite acceptable in today's job market is that of marketing yourself directly to companies. Think about the organisations that you would like to work for and approach them directly. Be prepared to have to 'sell yourself' and the value that you can provide.

- Networking

This is another important tool when seeking new employment. The majority of positions that are available in the current job market are what is called 'hidden jobs'. These roles are often filled before they are even advertised! Speak to everyone you know and let them know about the type of work you are seeking... have them act as your own personal sales force and do part of the job search process for you!

- Join a Self Help Group

Research indicates that a large proportion of unemployed individuals who are over the age of 55 years believe that this is partly to do with the fact that potential employers see them as being 'too old'. The Government is working to overcome this perception and our mature age workforce is high on the priority list of a number of political agendas. However to support mature age individuals who are currently seeking employment, Self Help Groups have been established. Contact your local Job Network member to find out more- go to www.jobnetwork.gov.au to find out your nearest one. Joining a Self Help Group is a great way to meet other people who are undergoing the same process. You will be able to support and motivate each other as you undertake the job search journey.

With the implementation of some of these tips and techniques you will be well on your way to securing your next role and rising above the barriers that you may face as a mature age job seeker.

On a final note, remember, as Vince Lombardi once said "*It's not whether you get knocked down; it's whether you get back up*".