

MID-LIFE / MATURE CAREER CHANGE

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What are the Issues that make a Mid-Life/Mature Career Transition different ?

Experienced and knowledgeable mature people often face difficulty maintaining their current jobs or finding new positions. Their job searches are usually twice as long and much more difficult than those of younger people.

Expectations are different; self-image is different.

Most mature workers were raised to believe that work has value beyond earning a living. It tells them and everyone else who they are, and where they fit in society.

To lose a job means failure to them, and mostly no amount of rationalization with fancy words can change that perception.

In addition to the personal life crisis, older workers often have to deal with extended responsibilities like mortgages, kids in college or parents needing attention.

Statistics show that mature people in career transition have often been in the same field for their whole careers, frequently with the same company. As a result, they find it difficult to imagine doing anything else, and they fail to realize that they have options. The job loss is usually unexpected, separating them from their professional associates as well as the corporate structure.

The younger generation, however, has an entirely different perspective. For them to think about a time when professional careers could be built by literally starting at the bottom and climbing the corporate ladder is simply amazing. Today the experience is more like jumping from ladder to ladder, hoping that occasionally you catch a higher rung.

Unlike the older generation, younger workers are not tied to their companies, and their identities are not entwined with their titles. When they lose a job it's not like falling off the ladder, it's just another jump to the next ladder. It's not uncommon for younger people to have three or four professional jobs before age 30. Instead of being a handicap to their job search it is an asset. Recruiters view their background as demonstrative flexibility, the ability to learn quickly, and high marketability.

Conversely, the perception of age, both by the person in mid-life career transition and by potential employers or the general public, is a major part of the problem for the mature worker. Studies from the University of Southern California prove however, that intellectual capabilities of older people are not only retained, but in many categories of cognitive functioning, they actually improve with age.

Unfortunately the reluctance to accept change in the workplace is often an underlying reason why people lose their jobs at mid-life. It is also a major factor in age discrimination in hiring. Too often people are entrenched in "the way we used to do it" and still insist on riding bicycles, when the rest of the companies are operating jet planes and getting ready for space travel....or so it seems.

Despite of all these facts, mature job seekers should stay positive and see the opportunity in such a career transition. The following tips and facts should provide some guidance with the work search.

*Excerpts taken from www.theageadvantage.com

Mature Workers & Job Search

Mature Workers and the Kamloops Job Market

Despite of the current economic downturn the first retirement wave of the Baby Boomer generation will start in 2011. It stands to reason that a lot of employees will leave the work force, freeing-up great jobs in all sectors of the economy for the next generation. The need for skilled and experienced workers in a variety of sectors will also offer an opportunity for mature job seekers to replace retiring Boomers .On the flipside, however, some mature workers might also hold on to their positions due to the economic downturn and loss of retirement savings.

Older Can be Better

It's no secret that job security is a thing of the past. Whether or not it's by choice, more and more people are making mid or late life career changes and with these changes come new challenges.

If you think your age is a disadvantage and you haven't conducted a job search or written a resume in years, you may think that a major career transition will require overcoming too many obstacles. The real obstacles to a midlife career change may reside in your own mind.

Top 5 Myths

Let's dispel several myths that employers appear to have about hiring 50-plus job searchers and the myths that keep people from pursuing the jobs they really want. Be proactive by using the following information in your cover letter or during the interview process to educate employers.

Myth #1 50-plus work searchers lack motivation

Any person actively searching for work is already motivated. Great amounts of energy and time are required to locate companies that are hiring as well as preparing resumes, cover letters and undergoing demanding interviews.

Myth #2 50-plus work searchers will be starting over at the bottom when they make a career change

Most people in their 50's have gained an impressive array of skills and have professional wisdom and perspective only acquired through time. The key to bypassing entry level status is to market these assets in an interview and to look at your most basic transferable skills.

Myth #3

50-plus work searchers are over the hill

On the contrary, older workers have had to keep up with ever-changing technologies. There will be a learning curve to any new career you try but the goal is to find a job or career that taps into your strengths and interests.

Myth #4

50-plus work searchers are slow and lack focus

Mature people may have more time on their hands and can focus on their work exclusively. Their children are grown up and they usually have less of a financial burden than young recruits.

Myth #5

50-plus work searchers lack creativity

Age is not a barrier to creativity. Some of the greatest scientific discoveries have been made by inventors in their mature years. Michelangelo, for instance, was commissioned to build the Dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome when he was 71.

Career Transition/Finding Work

The first reaction for most people when they lose a job is panic, immediately followed by determination to find another as quickly as possible. A long job search can be particularly difficult for someone who is in mid-career. A job loss is traumatic but it isn't the end of the world. It might even be the beginning of a new and better life.

For some people, full-time employment may be the only logical choice. The quickest and often the easiest career transition is to find a job that is as close as possible to your last, but don't ignore the opportunity to explore other areas.

If you are ready to make a change, here are some points to consider:

- If you have some management skills, use them to manage your career transition.
- Terrific job offers seldom land in people's laps unsolicited. Most people have to generate new opportunities through thoughtful and diligent effort.
- Reflect and take stock of your strengths. The new world of work invites you to understand who you are and where you best fit in the workplace.
- Some people have no idea what work is available because they don't know where to look.
- Don't let your job specific skills limit your new choices.
- Conduct research into the business sectors that interest you, the best companies to work for and the people you need to talk to.

- Look at your most basic transferable skills to develop a plan to assist you in locating the type of work that you may be interested in.
- Take advantage of community agencies such as: Pathways and the Kamloops Work Search Centres.

Powerful Mid-Career Resumes

The Resume

Your professional history at mid-age is a long one so it's no simple task to get it all down on paper. Be selective on what you include and make sure that your document reflects skills that are relevant to the position you are applying for. Keep in mind, your resume is your primary marketing tool and although it won't land you a job by itself, it can get you an interview for the right position.

Identify your accomplishments and create a resume that showcases your best work. Don't just turn it over to someone else to write. Too many resumes are a dull recital of job titles or a collection of buzzwords that don't tell the prospective employer much about the applicant. Ask yourself, "Does my resume really reflect the real me and highlight what I can do?"

Age

Should you try to hide your age when you are writing your resume? When you walk through the door for an interview your age may be obvious. Why risk having the interviewer feel that you have been deceptive by not mentioning it on your resume?

Consider using your resume to convince the reader of your capabilities and sell the reader on the idea that your age is an advantage. Be upfront about your age (although you don't have to give out your exact age) and let it be known that because you are older you possess the skills and experience needed to perform the job well.

The Summary Statement

The summary statement is the most important part of your resume. It is your sales pitch, a succinct statement that describes what you can do for a prospective employer. Remember that any claims you make must be substantiated by a detailed list of accomplishments within the body of the resume. The summary should paint a distinctive picture of who you are as a professional, highlighting your expertise and identifying primary skills. Please see the sample summary statement below.

Sample Summary Statement

- Resourceful, articulate receptionist with 25 years increasing responsibility in:
- Public Relations
 - Event Planning
 - Office Management

The Interview

The following pointers may seem self-evident but if you haven't been interviewed for a job in years it doesn't hurt to go over them.

- Practice your pitch even if it's just with the family dog.
- Take along extra copies of your resume but don't weigh yourself down with an oversized briefcase.
- Greet the interviewer with good eye contact and a firm handshake.
- If the interviewer's eyes start to glaze over condense your answer.
- Be clear, concise and specific. Interviewers prefer someone who has a specific position in mind and can sell themselves appropriately.
- Research the company before you go to the interview. If you have trouble coming up with three convincing reasons for wanting the job, it's probably not the right one for you.
- It is no longer enough to dress well, arrive on time and answer questions spontaneously. Today you must understand the process, anticipate the interviewer's objectives and questions, and practice your replies.
- If you're concerned that an answer hasn't hit the mark, ask the interviewer "Did I answer the question?" or "Is there anything else that you would like to know?"
- As the interview closes try to summarize your key strengths and qualifications.



10 Interview Questions for Older Workers to Anticipate

- 1. “You appear to be overqualified for this position. Won’t you get bored?”**
Hint: The employer may have legitimate concerns that you will leave the company when a new opportunity presents itself. Try to communicate that you understand that you may seem overqualified, but you know what you are getting into and your priorities have changed in regard to job satisfaction now that you have experienced a variety of work.
- 2. “This company is on the fast track. Do you think that you can keep up?”**
Hint: Consider hitting this question head-on by stating politely that you have not noticed any slowdown or stagnancy in your attitude or energy.
- 3. “This is a completely different industry than you were in before. Can you tell us how you will transfer your skills?”**
Hint: “I have accessed your website and done other research on your company.” (Then draw some analogy to a previous area of expertise and relate it to the new company’s product or service.)
- 4. “I have noticed that you have been out of work for over six months. Can you explain this break in employment?”**
Hint: “I tried retirement and it’s not for me. I like to be active. I feel I have many more years of productivity left.” **or**
“I am looking for something different. I am fortunate to be in a position to take time to make sure this job is right for both of us.”
- 5. “Why do you think you are qualified for this job? I don’t see where you have experience that would match our business needs.”**
Hint: Take this opportunity to point out any skills you have added to your repertoire. Identify a skill you have and align it to something you would need to do on the new job.
- 6. “Your resume indicates you have worked at a lot of different places. Can you comment on that?”**
Hint: Always turn a perceived negative into a real positive. “It does appear that way, but in the last 10 years the economy has been such that government cutbacks and other funding constraints have forced many organizations and businesses to shut-down or scale back. Fortunately I have been able to adapt to new situations quickly and this has led to an interesting career with different employers.”
- 7. “You were with your last company for 19 years. Can you change the way you did things?”**
Hint: “My last company underwent many changes during that time and I enjoyed trying new things and ideas.” Show examples whenever possible.

8. “We are on the cutting edge of technology, can you keep up?”

Hint: Again, reinforce skills, classes and upgrades you have had. You may need to mention these several times and in as many different ways as possible to overcome their doubt.

9. “I see you have been a consultant. Does that just mean you were out of work?”

Hint: “I understand lots of people are calling themselves consultants while they look for a new position. (Laugh-sometimes, it’s OK to insert a little bit of humour.) I actually used some of my entrepreneurial skills and created my own work opportunities.”

10. “What do you think you are worth since you have been in the work world so long?”

Hint: Never respond with a specific dollar amount. Affirm that you have vast skills and experience. Indicate that you are either willing to start over to show them what you bring to the table or deserving of top dollar. Either way, be confident.



More Information

Kamloops Work Search Centres Resource Library

*Handout:

- Transferable Skills
- Resumes
- Cover Letters
- Behavioral Interviews
- Contract Work
- Career Navigator - Mature Workers Newsletter

*Books:

- The Age Advantage: Making the Most of your Midlife Career Transition, Jean Erickson Walker
- Over 40 Job Search Guide, Gail Geary

*Websites

- 50 Plus Job Seeker www.50plus.com
- Ability Not Age www.abilitynotage.ca
- Diversity Working www.diversityworking.com
- Retirement Jobs www.retirementjobs.com
- Simply Hired (50+ Job Seeker) www.simplyhired.com/fiftyplus
- Skills Match (Mature Workers) www.theskillsmatch.ca
- The Age Advantage www.theageadvantage.com
- Mature Workers in AB & BC http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/RRM/PC_mature_workers.pdf

