

Mature Job Seeker – Beating the Bias (Part 2)

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Continued from 'Mature Job Seeker – Beating the Bias (Part 1)'

Following are some helpful hints that mature aged workers can utilise to make themselves more appealing to employers and thus improve their chances of a speedy return to the workforce;

Government or Community Assistance - Take advantage of government or community based initiatives and assistance. There is a considerable amount of free information and assistance available, and I would strongly recommend looking into these resources. For example, the DEEWR "Experience+" initiative provides free career planning and advice for over 45's until June 2016, along with an Assistance Program delivering refresher and basic training in IT and social media applications.

Value Proposition – Whether writing your resume or cover letter, or sitting in an interview, ensure the focus of discussion clearly remains on the value that you can bring to an organisation. Discuss how you can help, what you have done in the past and what you can deliver going forward. Outline how your experience might bring special insights and perspectives that other candidates may not possess.

Training - Undertake relevant training or up-skilling. Keeping 'up to date' is critical if you expect serious consideration for any position, especially if there is a technical element. The benefit will be that an employer will see that you have not fallen behind and therefore will not require retraining, along with any associated cost.

Resume – You will need a properly structured and well written resume to be considered for most roles. Use an appropriate resume style that is tailored to your strengths, skills and experience. Also ensure primary focus of your resume is on the last 5-10 years (include older information where pertinent). *Think about getting assistance from a professional resume writer, who can add value if you are looking to 'get it right the first time'.*

Age Bias – To counter potential impact of age bias, you will need to carefully address the following with any potential employer;

1. **Health** – Don't hesitate to communicate your good health and fitness to potential employers at opportune moments. Inform them if you play sport, run, walk or go to the gym regularly. This should allay any potential concerns about health.
2. **IT Savvy** - Take every opportunity to indicate your IT capability. Whether it's your ability to use specialised systems, the MS Office suite or even your use of Facebook or Twitter, this will highlight your ability to embrace new technology.
3. **Adaptability** – Highlight your adaptability in the workplace, providing actual examples where appropriate. If you don't know something, indicate you are keen to learn (and not that you wouldn't know where to start). Highlighting your adaptability will help to dispel concerns of rigidity and inflexibility.
4. **Team Player** – Communicating that you work well as part of a team is critical. It shows a willingness to take direction and work for the common good, and can

present you as less threatening, especially if the hirer feels concerned by a mature more experienced candidate.

5. **Be Positive** – Though you need to be fully prepared to discuss negative issues (weaknesses, why you are out of work, why you were made redundant, etc,) make every attempt to keep the discussion on a positive footing. Unless specifically asked, there is no need to volunteer this type of information.

While industry is beginning to see the light when it comes to acceptance of mature aged workers, the pace of change remains slow. While providence is on the right side due to the ageing Australian population and the inevitable necessity to hire older workers, the fact remains that age discrimination is still entrenched in much current thinking.

As a result, dealing with age bias will continue to be a challenge for the foreseeable future. However with the combination of positive government policy, changing attitudes and a proactive attitude to making oneself more appealing to employers (as outlined above), the situation is not without promise.

Honing your individual approach and message will take time and effort. To strike the right balance the mature jobseeker will need to walk a fine line between sounding experienced, but not old, adaptable, but not inflexible and appear keen, not desperate. There is no magic formula for success except practice, perseverance and occasionally seeking help where necessary.

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