

## Mature Job Seeker – Rejected 500 Times

By A.J. Bond

It was very disappointing to read the recent case of Ann Margulis (SMH, Feb 24, 'I Couldn't Even Buy a Job'). Ann, a 61 year old Sydney woman took to advertising for work on a giant billboard after being rejected for work nearly 500 odd times.

This story was disappointing on many levels. That Ann's story has unfolded while the Federal Government is actively pushing a number of initiatives (e.g. Experience+) to address the issue of age bias in the workforce is bad enough. What makes the situation worse is knowing this was no isolated incident. You can be sure there will be many 'Ann Margulis's quietly suffering rejection after rejection.

This unfortunate incident highlights two important points. First, age bias is clearly alive and well, and that employers have a long, long way to go in its acceptance of mature aged job seekers. That a woman so clearly able, capable and keen to find work cannot, is appalling and a damning indictment of business hiring practices. Shame on all those employers and recruiters who profess to have no bias, yet their actions clearly indicate otherwise.

While the government has clearly outlined the benefits of hiring mature workers (see [http://humanrights.gov.au/matureworkers/2\\_myths.html](http://humanrights.gov.au/matureworkers/2_myths.html)), the message is either not sinking in, or is doing so very slowly. The following findings clearly address the myths and stereotypes that older workers are confronted with;

- Mature age employees can save costs to employers through increased retention.
- There is a strategic business advantage of having employees who reflect the diversity of the customer base
- Mature age workers are less likely to take sick leave and experience work related injuries.
- Experience is a better indicator of productivity than age
- Older people are the fastest growing users of technology
- As the Australian population ages, hiring older people will become a necessity, so you might as well get with the program

Ann Margulis plight also highlights the lengths that mature aged job seekers are willing to go to find work. Ann had to deal with not 5, not 50 but 500 odd rejections. Most people half her age would have thrown in the towel after a handful of rejections, and promptly presented themselves at the mercy of Centrelink.

Ann Margulis's example tells us a great deal about our older workers. They desperately want to work, and are willing to go to great (and in this case unusual) lengths to find gainful employment. Only when employers cotton on to the benefits these keen and experienced workers can bring to the workplace, will we see practices change.

Why we as a society are happy to see a handful of older workers operating in very senior roles (Managing Directors, Chairmen, on Boards, as Politicians and on the Judiciary), yet we are not willing to accept them in numbers into responsible mid tier roles, begs the question - Why?

Off the record recruiters and employers may be willing to tell you that older workers can be more rigid, slower on the uptake or more difficult to manage than someone younger. However, they won't tell you they can feel insecure about hiring someone with more experience, someone who may challenge them or someone who may not always respond to their one dimensional management style.

Anyway you look at the situation, employers and recruiters don't come out looking great. Contrary to the positive benefits of hiring older workers, employers persist in putting older workers in the too hard basket. It's easier to hire someone younger - not better- just easier.

It is still too early to say whether the government's initiatives to re-educate the market about older workers is failing, but it is not too early to say there is still much work to be done. Bias in any form is never easily overturned, especially when trying to modify a lifetime of pre-conceived beliefs.

And while the government needs to continue to educate employers about the benefits of hiring older workers, individuals like Ann Margulis will need to keep on keeping on. Keep applying for roles, keep their skills up to date, stay positive and seek assistance when necessary.

Hopefully it won't come to advertising on a billboard to find work.

A.J. Bond, is the proprietor of Absolute Resume, an Australian based consultancy specializing in the provision of Resume, BIO and Cover Letter writing services.

We assist a range of jobseekers to find work, especially those who have been out of the workforce for a period of time, mature aged job seekers and those made redundant. Call us on 1300 669 688 for a chat.