



Over Forty and Looking for Work How to Survive a Long Job Search Process

By Clay Parsons

Those of us who are over forty and looking for work face special challenges to maintain a positive outlook and achieve our job search goals, especially during a long recession. How do we keep our focus and stay on track without becoming frustrated and depressed? The following are a few suggestions for maintaining your health and sanity, and the momentum you will need to conduct a successful job search in today's marketplace.

Don't get discouraged.

First of all, recognize that it is very easy to get discouraged. Many boomers have never had to look for work, so they have to learn the game, which makes it even more time consuming and frustrating. Remember, over the long haul you need to keep believing in yourself. Don't take rejection personally. Try to keep the process in perspective. If you don't get that coveted interview it's not the end of the world. You may get the next one. There are a lot of other people out there in the same boat. During good economic times it sometimes takes four to six months to find a senior position. During a recession it may take twice as long. That does not reflect on you as a person, or on your qualifications, or on you as a prospective employee. It is simply a question of supply and demand. The fewer number of positions available and the more people chasing after them, the longer it will take. Try to accept it, make some adjustments to your lifestyle, and concentrate all of your attention on the process and your targets.

Look out for road blocks.

In addition to navigating the emotional ups and downs of an extended job search, be aware of some common road blocks which complicate the process for older workers. Age discrimination is a scourge in our society, along with all of the other forms of discrimination. Try to avoid buying into it and believing the negative myths about age promoted by our image conscious consumer culture. Look at it from a different perspective. Remember that youth is inexperience, while age is experience and wisdom! You have something really valuable to offer any employer, i.e., what you have learned during all of those years of work. Also shift your game plan to focus on those positions which celebrate and respect experience. They do exist! Teaching and counseling are just two examples. And, perhaps most importantly, keep an open mind. You may find that your next career opportunity may be in a role you could never have predicted just a few short years ago.

Watch your beliefs.

Our beliefs can also help or hinder the job search process. One commonly held belief which can paralyze older workers is that if they leave their field for another, or even leave their old company for another, they will have to start all over again at the bottom and work their way up. This is simply not born out by the facts. Unless you are planning to move from retail management to astrophysics, in which case a Ph.D. may be in order, you bring with you from your old field many learned and transferable skills. Many of these are very marketable and can be directly applied in your new occupation or position. You may need some training or schooling of course but the “back to the beginning” belief simply does not apply most of the time. Also the older worker is more likely to advance quickly in a new field, becoming an “expert” with minimal actual on-the-job experience.

Take advantage of the opportunity.

Being unemployed also has its advantages, in addition to sleeping late on weekdays. Look at it as a window of opportunity, a time to take stock of your life and career paths. Try answering these questions. Where are you, where have you been, and where are you going? Are you doing something you really enjoy? If after careful thought you discover, like so many of us, that your work has grown old and stale, or worse, or that you see it only as a duty that you are performing under daily protest, then perhaps you need to consider a career change. Consult with a professional career counselor before you make the move. They can help you navigate the change process.

Find support.

Also keep in mind that there is power in numbers. The opportunity to network with others, learn of job openings, and solve career and personal problems while you are looking for work is invaluable. Join a job search and/or career change support group facilitated by a seasoned and qualified career professional. Share your experiences and compare notes with others who are dealing with the same issues. Exchange ideas, plan your job search campaign together and have others critique your results. Help yourself and help others in the process. Believe me it will make your journey much easier.

Be innovative in your approach.

Lastly, some enlightened soul said the following. “If you think you can’t, you can’t, if you think you can, you can.” In short, how we see our job search or career change campaign will determine in large part if we are successful. I agree that the market right now is lousy, or as one of my clients said recently, “on R & R somewhere else !”, but I know from experience that there is always a way; if not through the front door of the company, then through the back door; if not over the Internet and job ads, then through networking; and if not by traditional methods then by improvisation and new ideas. Don’t be afraid to step outside of the box and try something different. Be a job search entrepreneur!

Keep at it.....You will succeed.