



Aging is not 'lost youth' but a new stage of opportunity and strength.
Betty Friedan

Age Discrimination, or Is It?

by Renée Lee Rosenberg, Five O'Clock Club Coach and author of
"Achieving the Good Life After 50: Tools and Resources for Making It Happen"

Are you over 50 and want to continue to work after you retire? Are you afraid to look for work? Do you think finding work will be difficult because employers want to hire younger people? Charles, 62, lamented, "I feel discouraged because of my age. I'm not going to continue looking for work. I'll just collect my social security check at an earlier age than I planned."

The U.S. Department of Labor projects that the total U.S. workforce population over 55 will rise to 20% in 2012 from 13% in 2000. More older people will be working in the years ahead, even though age discrimination remains strong in some industries. Will you be included in the over 55-and-still-working statistic? Or are you giving in to age discrimination like Charles and telling yourself, "Employers don't want to hire people my age. Why bother?"

Most of the job hunters who attend the Five O'Clock Club are in their 40's, 50's, and 60's. Some are in their 70's. The average, regularly attending member has a new job within ten weekly sessions.

Twelve Suggestions to Combat Age Discrimination

If you feel discouraged and fear employers will discriminate against you because of your age, empower yourself by following these twelve suggestions:

1. See yourself as capable of succeeding and not as a victim. You can choose how you want others to see you.
2. Value the depth of resources, strengths and talents you bring to the table.

3. Present your unique strengths effectively while doing your best to overcome barriers standing in your way.

4. Avoid falling prey to the myths about older workers.

5. Identify and study inspirational models to encourage you. Read stories and/or watch videos describing mature persons who peaked in their later years. Find contemporary mentors actively involved in living full, rich lives.

6. Be flexible and adaptable toward change. Prepare and practice a positioning statement that demonstrates you are a person who is successful in learning new skills.

7. Answer the question, "What am I passionate about?" and go for it.

8. Have confidence you will succeed. Visualize your success.

9. Create a targeted résumé that draws attention to your strengths and experiences. Read *Positioning Yourself: The Targeted Résumé* by Kate Wendleton and seek the assistance of a career coach to help you position yourself correctly on your résumé.

10. Keep enthusiasm and energy levels high and maintain a sense of humor.

11. Remain current: read trade magazines in your field, enroll in classes, attend conferences, and join associations. Sign-up for Google Alerts and request specific email updates of the latest relevant Google results of topics you are interested in. Go to www.google.com/alerts for more information.

And most importantly:

12. Accept the fact there are some organizations that won't hire you because you're older. You can fight them, but why waste your energy? It's more useful to be proactive and to redi-

rect your energy toward discovering people and companies that welcome mature workers.

What is important is not what happens to us, but how we respond to what happens to us.
Jean-Paul Sartre

More older people will be working in the years ahead.

Countering Negative Thoughts

Don't let negative thoughts about age discrimination sidetrack you. You are not a stereotype. Don't give others permission to make you feel the discouraged. You might have heard well-intentioned friends or relatives say to you, "You're too old, why bother looking for work?" Or perhaps, "What! You're going on an interview? You're wasting your time; they only hire young people." Don't let these people's perspective squelch your passion and throw you off your course.

The best way to counter age discrimination is to develop strong net-

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TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR MAKING IT HAPPEN

- A New Approach to Retirement
- Discovering Yourself and Where You Want to Go
- Maintaining Your Motivation and Morale

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works and to maintain a positive attitude. Credentials open doors but equally important are motivation, energy, courage, optimism, enthusiasm, confidence and persistence.

Optimists usually expect the best outcome, so they're generally more motivated to bring it into reality.
Norman Vincent Peale

Create a Positive Affirmation

Negative words lead to negative thoughts, leading to negative actions. Create an affirmation specifically geared toward handling negative age discrimination thoughts.

Some examples are:

- "I am a unique, experienced person who is worth hiring."
- "I can find the right job to match my skills; my age is irrelevant."
- "I can capitalize on my knowledge and expertise to help me obtain meaningful work."
- "Other people my age are getting hired. I can too."
- "I can identify many opportunities for meaningful part-time employment."
- "I am smart, capable and dependable and will be an asset to any company."

Use one of the above or create your own personal affirmation. Be sure to put it in writing and repeat it often.

If you believe you can, you probably can. If you believe you won't, you most assuredly won't. Belief is the ignition switch that gets you off the launch pad.
Denis Waitley

Negative Stereotypes of "Old" Are Disappearing

The 50+ boomer generation is redefining what aging represents, as its members are declaring that they want to remain engaged, active, and productive into their 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and, increasingly, 100s.

There is a steady rise in the proportion of older Americans remaining in the workforce. A Federal government study

shows that employment rates for men 65 to 69 grew to 34 percent while for women 65 to 69 rates increased to 24 percent. The report points out that work force participation rates for individuals 70 and over have been increasing markedly in the last decade.

I have enjoyed greatly the second blooming.... Suddenly you find —at the age of 50, say—that a whole new life has opened before you.
Agatha Christie

Focus on Your Unique Skills

A Towers Perrin study, along with other major studies, identified favorable attributes older workers bring to the work environment. If you start to think nega-



"I know you're good with computers, Smythe, but can you play the drums? A couple of us got a band together and we're hitting the road with Kid Rock."

tively and begin to feel discouraged about your age, focus on the list below to remind yourself how capable you and your boomer cohorts are. Use these attributes when describing yourself to others.

Retire at sixty-five is ridiculous. At sixty-five I still had pimples.
George Burns

Favorable Attributes of Older Workers

- Experienced
- Dedicated, loyal
- Possess a sense of strategic focus
- Exceed expectations

- Attend to task and stay motivated
- Dependable and stable
- Exhibit high levels of productivity
- Use common sense, insight and wisdom to develop innovative solutions
- Long-term industry knowledge
- Can process complex information
- A strong sense of motivation and perseverance to succeed at the job
- High levels of engagement
- Communicate with older customers
- Results-driven

Joan Changed Her Attitude and Got the Job

When Joan, 64, was downsized, she felt no one would hire her because of her age. She didn't realize that she was buying into the stereotype of aging by undervaluing both her skills and the knowledge and experience she had gained in her many years of employment. We worked together to reestablish her self-esteem and ego-strength by discussing her skills and achievements from her Seven Stories Exercise. She created a list of her talents, skills and accomplishments. She then crafted her positioning statement: "I have 19 years' experience dealing with client requests, as well as researching and cataloging legal documents. I am a dedicated, loyal employee known for exceeding expectations in developing new client markets and completing assigned tasks ahead of schedule. My experience has taught me the importance of being open to change and being able to work under pressure, and effectively and quickly dealing with client problems and concerns."

She wrote her statement on an index card and carried it with her, practicing it several times a day. Joan was able to clearly articulate her skills and experience and gave very little thought to her age during her interviews. She felt confident about her abilities and optimistic about her opportunities for employment. Within six months after she left her job, she was hired by a legal support company to work three days a

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week as a customer service researcher, contacting clients and researching reports and data.

Joan was hired because she realized she had the skills and experience that employers are seeking. She did her research, knew the needs of the company and sold her skills to hiring managers.

During Your Job Search Follow These Five Concepts:

1. Research and network.
2. Lead with a positive attitude.
3. Develop and practice a positioning statement based on the needs of the organization you are targeting.
4. Stay optimistic; don't let rejection get the best of you.
5. Maintain a sense of humor.

Optimism is the father that leads to achievement.

Helen Keller

Write Your Positioning Statement

Keep in mind the most important points you want the hiring person to know about you, review your results from the Seven Stories Exercise and refer to the words in the list above as a guide. For example:

- "I am an experienced, results driven, dedicated worker."
- "My skill and ability to identify and bring in new business will far exceed your expectations."
- "My long-term knowledge of the industry will benefit your company."

If you're having trouble, this may be a good time to seek help from a career coach.

Age and Experience Will Work in Your Favor

When Shirley, 55 was downsized she followed the Five O'Clock methodology to obtain her new position. When she met with the vice president of the company after she was hired he told her, "I was able to get the organization to meet your salary needs because of your age and experience."

The message? Don't underestimate your value. Many employers will

appreciate the experience and maturity that you bring to their company.

Don't Draw Conclusions Until You Have Gathered All the Facts

The following is excerpted from the article, "Is it Age Discrimination? Or Simply Discouragement?" by Kate Wendleton featured in *The Five O'Clock News*, March 2004.

We have a maxim at the Club: If the reason for your difficult search could be anything beyond discrimination (age, gender, race, and so on), what could it be? Identify that, and fix it.

Yes, discrimination exists, but a job hunter may be too quick to blame discrimination. Let's tackle the age issue... Generally speaking, those who are older also earn more. Older workers have to determine whether their salaries are keeping them out of work. Salary discrimination is not the same as age discrimination. If salary seems to be getting in the way of finding employment, job hunters can change the salaries they demand...

People over 55 may feel they've paid their dues, have a terrific record of accomplishments, and should not have to put in as much job-search effort as a younger person. But this attitude is unrealistic and can keep an older worker out of the workforce—while he or she is chalking it up to discrimination.

Thus for many older people, the problem is perceived discrimination. It's the hopelessness of not seeing a positive response and giving up too quickly. The job market has been unusually challenging for everyone recently, not just for those over 55. Job hunters should also consider whether their field, industry, or geographic area has been hit particularly hard. If so, that's not discrimination either... If age weren't the issue, what would it be? If you were 40 instead of over 50, what would you do? Do those things. Forget about your age problem, and try to solve the others, including your own discouragement.

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The Job-Search Buddy System

Do you wish you had someone to talk to—fairly often and informally—about the little things?



"Here's what I'm planning to do today in my search? What are you planning to do? Let's talk tomorrow to make sure we've done it." You and your job-search buddy could keep each other positive and on track, and encourage each other to do what you told the small group you were going to do: Make that call, send out those letters, write that follow-up proposal, focus on the most important things that should be done—rather than (for example) spending endless hours responding to job postings on the Web.

With your buddy, practice your Two-Minute Pitch, get ready for interviews, bounce ideas off each other. Some job-search buddies talk every day. Some talk a few times a week. Most of the conversation is by phone and e-mail.

Sometimes, people match themselves up as buddies. Just pick someone you get along with in your small group. Sometimes, your coach can match you up. However you do it, stay away from negative people who talk about how bad it is out there. They will drag you down.

The small group changes over time: people get jobs; new people come in. If you lose one buddy who got a job, get another buddy.

Your buddy does not have to be in your field or industry. In fact, being in the same field or industry could keep you focused on the industry rather than on the process. But you *do* have to get along! The relationship may last only a month or two, or go on for years. Some buddies become friends.

Of course, you should see your Five O'Clock Club career coach *privately* for résumé review, target development, salary negotiation, and job interview follow-up. It's usually best to get professional coaching advice for these areas. ●

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You could have 15 more years of work, or maybe not. This is a problem to be solved, and I know you can do it — as long as YOU don't think that your age is the primary issue here.

Be cautious about drawing conclusions based on either too little information or on your preconceived notions about aging. Are you drawing faulty conclusions or making assumptions before you gather the facts? Could it be something other than your age that prevented you from getting that callback or job offer?

Try Consulting or Working Pro Bono

If you are starting out in a new career or want to try a new job functions, consider working as a consultant or volunteering your time and working *pro bono* until you get some experience. This strategy works no matter what your previous title or job responsibility may have been. I was honored to hear Howard Putnam speak at the National Speakers Association Convention in Orlando, Florida, in 2006, where he talked about how to grow a new business. Howard was the former president

and CEO of Southwest Airlines, and is credited with making that company a success. After leaving Southwest, he became CEO of Braniff International and was the first CEO to successfully guide a major airline into, through, and out of bankruptcy. He also is the author *The Winds of Turbulence*, a book about leadership and ethics.

Could it be something other than your age that prevented you from getting that callback or job offer?

Now in his late 60s, Howard built a successful business as a speaker after his retirement from the airline industry. He told the audience that he knew he was in trouble when, in the early stages of his speaking career, a prospective client asked whether he believed in The First Amendment, which guarantees free speech. Howard said yes, of course, only to realize he was now committed to speaking for free! But, he stated, he actually did speak for free many times in the

beginning of his new career, as a way of building his credentials and establishing his reputation.

His story demonstrates that no matter how successful you have been in the past, when building a new career you have to begin by paying your dues and maybe even working for little or no money. Howard Putnam's other message for success was to *let go of old habits and develop a new personal vision*. He offered the following advice for beginning a new endeavor, "Feel it, nurture it, and make it happen." What wonderful advice from a man who knows how not to let adversity stop him from succeeding. Don't let your age undermine your enthusiasm toward achieving your goal.

I hope that, as you follow the suggestions in this article, you will have gained a more optimistic outlook about aging. Position yourself as a winner and proceed forward.

When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, "I used everything you gave me."

Erma Bombeck ●



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