

UK Learning College



Mid life Unemployment?

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## **Introduction**

Marina Whelen received some bad news last year. Her employer was forced to lay off staff, and she was among them.

A senior PA for 18 years in a small publishing firm, she decided to look for a new position, and re-entered a job market that had radically changed. Marina was well qualified, with a wealth of experience, but quickly found discouragement at every turn.

Some employers were concerned she would become quickly frustrated in positions she was overqualified for. She was offered salaries far beneath what she considered reasonable, or found interviewers simply not interested. Marina experienced an unstated but apparent bias against her because of her age.

## **Discrimination?**

Employment data reveals the only category of 'discouraged jobseekers' that rose in 2003, was that of mature aged workers (45 and over), with drops in all other age groups. The latest government figures tell us 61% of job seekers over 60 rate being 'considered too old by employers' as the number one reason for giving up looking for work.

Mature age job seekers like Marina that return to the job market often find themselves forced to take on part time or casual employment after an unsuccessful search for jobs in their field. Many admit defeat, underselling their skills in order obtain lower paid jobs after finding themselves locked out of the workforce by employer biases.

The frustrating reality is that mature age jobseekers can often be the perfect candidates. They have the lowest rates of sick leave of any age category and can often bring a wealth of experience to a role. They are in many ways likely to be a more stable, more reliable employee.

## **The future?**

While bias exists for many today, the fact that our workforce is aging is a certainty, and employers ignore it to their detriment. Drake International estimate 85% of all workforce growth will be supplied by people aged 45+ by 2012, up from 32% in 1992.

Our labour market already has severe shortages in many skilled trades including education, health, automotive and transport and distribution sectors. Those employers who do not open their eyes to a more balanced approach to recruiting will increasingly find recruiting candidates very difficult indeed.

**"I didn't expect to be having to consider this at my age, I thought I'd be planning my retirement!"**

## **What can I do now?**

There are a number of ways to increase the odds in your favour if you are a mature age jobseeker.

## **Try these tips when applying for jobs:**

### **Refresh**

Update your CV, removing any references to your date of birth. In addition, you should seriously consider removing references in your employment history older than ten years. Alternatively, list your successes without dates under a heading such as 'Achievements' or 'Previous experience'.

### **Transfer**

When the search for a new role becomes frustrating, the temptation can be to apply for anything that comes along, lowering your expectations. Consider instead, expanding your options by looking at opportunities in other industries. You may double your job opportunities by thinking laterally about which of your skills are likely to be transferable.

### **Relearn**

In a study conducted by the University of NSW in 2000, 1000 business were asked to rate their reasons mature jobseekers were less successful in the job applications. Employers identified applicants either not possessing current skills, or being unable to demonstrate the relevance of their skills as the most significant reasons for not employing them over other candidates. To ensure your skills are relevant, review each requirement in the job description, and make a note of what is most relevant out of your current skill set. Updating your skills with a refresher course in a related discipline can be effective way of demonstrating a continued interest in your field, and an intention to keep your skills up to date. Although a history of experience can work in your favour, demonstrating knowledge of the latest developments in your industry can also be an advantage for any jobseeker.

**Think laterally and strategically when approaching your job hunt, and get back to work sooner!**