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### **Advice for Mature Job Seekers (Ages 45+)**

Sprouting any gray hairs lately? Maybe a few new wrinkles? If you're over 40, it's natural. Why then do so many hiring managers treat us like we're Geritol addicts who quietly pass our days playing pinochle in the park?

It's even more bizarre when you realize that the 40 – 69 age group accounts for more than a third of our population. By 2011, that'll jump to 13.5 million people—over 40% of Canadians!

Meanwhile, word from the street is it's harder than ever for “mature workers” to get hired. “It's a huge, huge problem,” says Graham Carver, President of Cambridge Management Planning, an executive search and outplacement boutique. Too many people chasing too few opportunities is how he puts it.

Here's how Carver explains things. There are too many people chasing dwindling opportunities. Mergers and acquisitions have led to fewer mid and senior level positions with larger firms. Also, a number of companies have shifted decision making to their home office, whether in the U.S. or foreign climes. Add to that how existing employees are being squeezed for every ounce of productivity—and you're left with slimmer pickings.

On top of this, “Employers are attempting to bring in younger workers, say in their 30's or early 40's, to groom them for succession into senior management,” says Carver.

All in all it sounds pretty grim. But then I talked to a colleague who's seeing different sides of things. Jim Geraghty is the Program Director at HAPPEN, Canada's largest networking group for unemployed mid-level managers and senior exec's. “At least one person a day from our group is getting a job as of late,” boasts Geraghty. Many are getting good, full-time positions, complete with benefits. Others are starting their own businesses, getting consulting gigs or latching on to fixed-term contract jobs.

When I asked him about age discrimination, he told me that, yes, he'd heard about some recruiters specifying that only under 45's need apply. On the other hand, a few are requesting mature candidates. The idea is this: For a little more money you get someone who's been through several business cycles, has a disciplined understanding of how work gets done, and can mentor others.

But for people like Guri Ragalyi, a 47 year old software engineer who is having a terrible time finding work in his field, it can feel outright hopeless. Ragalyi was a thriving part of JDS Uniphase in Ottawa until late 2001. When the tech bubble burst, he was downsized along with 3,000 others. (Today the company has 5700 employees worldwide, down from 29,000 in 2001).

Ragalyi, who has a B.A. and is a certified information analyst, has been networking and sending out resumes consistently. Still, he has had to resort to taking a part-time job as a banquet server. His Employment Insurance ran out last February. Now he now he relies on welfare, a situation he desperately wants to change.

Does he feel his age works against him? “I have never been told that I'm too old,” says Ragalyi, “but somehow I feel it. When you see young people everywhere in an office, and you are 10 years older than the hiring person, it is hard not to think there's a barrier.”

How then to leverage your age and experience? For one thing, consider trimming your resume to show the last 12 to 15 years only. And leave out the dates you graduated from school. This reduces your chances of getting screened out on the first cut.

As things are, it helps if you take care of yourself. Eat well, get regular exercise, and try for the right amount of sleep. Hard to do if you're out of work or anxious about losing your job, of course. But the harsh fact is employers these days want vital people working for their company.

A friend of mine, who recently turned 50, dyes his hair. He looks five years younger. Other people keep their wardrobe current, update their glasses or go for contacts. Note: I'm not suggesting you do this--it just shows the pressure to shave off perceived years is very real.

Here are some other tips for beating age discrimination:

- make sure you keep your skills and knowledge current. Take courses, attend seminars, go to trade shows, read industry publications, and learn the latest software

- look for companies that respect maturity. CARP, Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus (50plus.com), is starting a Best Employers Award for 50-Plus Canadians, along with FGI, an established Employee Assistance Program firm. They're having a tough time getting applicants so if you know of any firms to brag about, get in touch with Eric Vengroff, CARP's Vice-President, Marketing (ericv@50plus.com)

- Get involved with professional associations or volunteering. By making concrete contributions and expanding your network, you increase the chances of being judged on your abilities.

- Try not to act like a victim at interview time. Instead, focus on the positives of maturity. Offer to put in odd hours that younger workers with family obligations can't. Play up your loyalty, flexibility, strong work ethic, leadership, experience, hunger to do well etc.

Government help in this area is shamefully lacking. I called around for hours to find older worker resources. I managed to learn about a two day workshop sponsored by Human Resources Canada called "Finding Work When You're Over 45." And a Government of Canada website ([http://www.jobsetc.ca/whatif.jsp?jsessionid=704F7D3D102A73580F5C11AC520AA489.jvm5?category\\_id=740&crumb=68&lang=e](http://www.jobsetc.ca/whatif.jsp?jsessionid=704F7D3D102A73580F5C11AC520AA489.jvm5?category_id=740&crumb=68&lang=e)) with shockingly little info.

On the upside, Guri was told just this week that he qualifies for a government sponsored wage subsidy--if he can find full-time employment.

Beyond this, how can we fight discrimination against older workers? Try asking the people who hire at your firm to consider more mature workers. Or petition our government to start putting some targeted programs together (canada.gc.ca/directories/direct\_e.html for federal MP's, <http://olaap.ontla.on.ca/mpp/parlrdg.jsp?glbwc=current> for provincial MP's). Also, think about joining CARP or related organization, and helping them advocate to employers and the government. Suing for age discrimination is a last resort option, but proving it is notoriously iffy.

In the end, this issue will affect every one of at some point in our lives. Let's face it: You're older now than when you started reading this article. Hopefully a little wiser, too.

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Also... Please see my article entitled "Looking Younger at Interview Time," at [www.careeractivist.com/myarticles/mature-Looking-Younger-At-Interview-Time](http://www.careeractivist.com/myarticles/mature-Looking-Younger-At-Interview-Time)