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Getting Back in the Work Force After 50

By Susan Dunn

**Getting Back in the Work Force After 50 by Susan Dunn, MA, Emotional Intelligence Coach
& Consultant**

Whether you've been forced into early retirement, downsized, or are tired of being at home and eager to work again, or even taking your first job, entering the work force after the age of 50 can hold some challenges. Here are some tips from someone who coaches a lot of people in this transition.

FOCUS ON YOUR SKILLS

Focus on the skills you have, not your deficits. Chances are you've accumulated a great range of talents over the years, particularly people skills. Studies show that Emotional Intelligence generally increases up to the age of 50 or so (Reuven Bar-On, Ph.D.) and EQ includes those "soft skills" so sought after in today's work place.

Your ability to handle stress and handle people can be a great asset.

'GET' WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE

Don't be intimidated if you haven't had the chance to get computer-proficient. Sign up for courses at the local community college or computer store. People over 50 are the fastest growing segment on the Internet.

You can also read. A friend of mine who had been a school counselor for many years decided to apply for a job as principal. She read as many text books on the subject as she could find before the interview, aced the interview and got the job.

You could also, of course, get an online degree, or a bricks-and-mortar degree, but the possibility exists of doing this on your own time, spending less money and perhaps doing it more rapidly.

FOCUS ON THE PLUSSES

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A friend of mine who's 59 applied for a job recently, and both the HR person and the manager she interviewed with asked her - though it's probably not "legal" - if she had children. Clearly this was an office that had experienced difficulties with parents taking time off for their children, and were looking for someone not so encumbered.

Whether or not it's "right" for employers to look at it this way, once your children have left the home, or are grown, driving, self-sufficient and back home, you have an asset to offer. You won't be calling in when the kids are sick, or leaving early to take them for orthodontist appointments, and you can find a way to mention this. My friend capitalized on this, and she got the job though she'd been out of the work force for three years and was nearly 60. (And at her highest salary to-date.)

IT ISN'T 'AGE-RELATED' (NLESS YOU THINK IT IS)

A client of mine was entering the work force at the age of 60 and mentioned concern about his memory. Some people experience some short-term memory loss as they age, though it can be minimal, and it also depends upon the individual. I asked him some questions around this, and by the end of our conversation he admitted that he'd "always been that way," and really hadn't suffered an appreciable deficit.

Be particularly cognizant of this on the first few weeks on the job. Everyone who takes a new job is stressed, and stress affects us cognitively as well as emotionally. These days, every fax machine, every phone, and every filing system is different. What you knew in the past doesn't always apply. What does apply is your ability to focus, learn and apply. If you anticipate having problems because of your age, you'll add that source of stress to the mix, and, like all self-fulfilling prophecies, you may make it come true.

If you do forget some things the first days on the job, which is quite normal, just keep forging ahead. You might also find it helpful to carry a notepad with you and write things down. One client mentioned she was having trouble remembering whether you needed a "1" prior to one of the area codes in our vicinity, a problem typical in many metro areas these days. She thought she was losing it, until a much younger co-worker told her, "No one can remember that. Just try it with, then try it without."

Don't vocally attribute things to "age". Do this as a service to yourself, but also to other older workers. Any time you make a comment such as, "I'm getting too old to bend over like this/remember file codes like this/fight with a machine like this, you're doing a disservice to other older workers.

My client Isabelle is 55. The last office she worked in, she was the fastest typist, able to keyboard at over 100 wpm. She was one of the few in the office not wearing a wrist brace, or suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome.

If you have physical impairments, don't attribute them to age, because there are plenty of people your age who don't have them. There are people with severe osteoarthritis in their 30s, and people like Isabelle, who seem immune to the disease. It has nothing to do with age.

USE IT OR LOSE IT

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If you're returning to the work force in a completely new field it may have been quite a while since you learned something new. I have a friend who's a physician who is just burnt out. He's going into sales, because he doesn't want to retire. However, the field of medicine has changed dramatically over his lifetime, and kept him learning new things, so he's not at all troubled by the fact.

Continuous lifetime learning is one of the keys to resilience, an important EQ competency. If you've gotten lax about learning, embrace this opportunity.

ATTITUDE

I have a number of clients over 50 who are looking for jobs or new careers. There's a difference between those who have chosen this path, and those who feel they were `forced' into it. I think of a friend of mine who found out, after her third child, she couldn't have any more babies. "I really didn't want any more kids," she said. "It just made me furious not to have the choice."

Emotional Intelligence means managing your emotions. If you're stuck in a situation you don't like, the

only thing you can control is your attitude. No one wants to work with someone who's negative, pessimistic or hostile, no matter how great their skills or expertise, no matter what their age.

If you're having trouble managing your attitude, consider getting help with this.

GET A COACH

Coaching is wonderful for this transition. You will likely encounter negatives from those around you. People may tell you, "You'll never get a job at this age," or "No one will hire you for anything decent." To counter this, you need support, and you also need specific examples to the contrary, which a coach who works in this area can provide. I can tell you many specific examples from my own coaching practice.

IT WILL TAKE LONGER

Not necessarily. Everyone who looking for "the" job these days has a hard go of it. It depends upon many factors, including the job market in the town where you live.

NO ONE WANTS TO MANAGE `THEIR MOTHER"

I interviewed an HR professional to check out the other side of the picture. He agreed that some managers don't want a report who's the age of their parent, but some do; and some don't even notice. Managers are human and they have their idiosyncrasies. Some don't like young, unseasoned workers! The best managers are eager for the richness of a mix of ages, backgrounds, and expertise because they know what it can add to the bottom line.

AGE DISCRIMINATION

As the HR professional pointed out, it's people over 40 who are protected, and, as he said, "Do you have any idea how many people this applies to?" Quite a few. If you encounter someone who has prejudices against older workers, then go find someone who doesn't. They're out there.

HAVE A PLAN

Getting a job in today's market requires a commitment of time and energy. I recommend you work with a coach to help you come up with a plan, stay enthusiastic and keep at it. Don't listen to people who are negative about it. There are plenty of people over 50 back in the work force and loving it. The best is yet to come!

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The Nike Air Force One – It Ain't What You Think

By Mike F. Prince

I just got a new pair of Nike Air Force One shoes, and I am on cloud number nine. My custom Nike Air Force Ones are the coolest thing that I have seen in years. These ones are a special St. Patrick's Day addition, done in bright green and white. Very retro and stylish. I have originally intended save my Nike Air Force One shoes solely for playing basketball, but the thing is, I just can not take them off of my feet. Everyone who sees it casts me a look of envy, because they know that I've got the cash flow to buy the nice threads. Some people say it's shallow, but I ask you, is it shallow to want other people to look up to you because of your nice clothes. Of course it isn't.

Inevitably, there are some kids who don't surrender their hearts and souls to my Nike Air Force One shoes, but they are strictly losers. There's this one hippy kid who always is telling some story to denounce my swoosh, because he says that it promotes sweatshops, whatever that means, but I can tell that he is just plain jealous of my Air Force One sneakers. Come one, look at what he's got. He's perpetually showing off his "black spot" shoes as if the black spot is something special. Yeah, whatever. Black spot is not the swish. And that swish is just what I have got on my Nike Air Force One shoes.

But it is not all about the style, or even the performance of Nike Air Force One shoes, although that is part of the attraction, for me. I have never felt more comfortable in my game than since I bought my Air Force 1 shoes. They give me more confidence and athletic freedom, and more game all around than I have ever had before. Not like the black spot kid who never even touches the ball.

But really, what I like about my Nike Air Force One shoes is just being myself. Because, you see, that is really what it is all about. And it is easy to be myself in my Nike Air Force One shoes, because they are exactly what I am all about. But you try to tell that to one of those dorky kids, always pretending that they're doing great things by saving the environment and foreign workers and crud like that. They

are so busy trying to impress others that they never get it. I never waste my time with them. I've got my Nike Air Force One shoes for company.

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