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Smashing the Gray Ceiling

By Virginia Bola, PsyD

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For decades, women have chafed at the invisible glass ceiling which prevents their moving into the high executive brackets that their competence, knowledge and skills have earned. The same amorphous barrier confronts older workers both in terms of advancement within a company and, most especially, when a job change is required. There is an adage in the military that if a rank above major has not been obtained within twenty years, it never will be. The ranks of early military retirees are sprinkled with majors who knew that ten or fifteen more years would never bring a Colonel's cluster.

How can such "unwritten rules" be fought? No lawsuit can prove that you were the best individual for the job. No employer is unintelligent enough to state that your age is the stumbling block. You sense the discrimination, you become aware of the sideways glances and the emotional response of an interviewer, but you feel powerless to change their perspective and their bias.

Sitting across an interviewing desk, often facing an individual the same age as your son, your esteem erodes and your confidence self-destructs. Impotent, humiliated, and angry, you accept that nothing you can say is going to change anything. You continue job hunting with a mounting sense of frustration and an indisputable anticipation of failure.

If you have nothing to lose, why not attack the problem head-on? Prejudice and discrimination survive only in the silence of unexamined judgments and, often unconscious, illogic. Confront the situation and at least you create the opportunity for the white light of reason to enter the fray.

Try these approaches to prompt more honest interaction and possibly more rational conclusions.

1. You need to be the one to put the age issue on the table. Offer it gently, as one area of needed exploration regarding why you fit the employer's needs. Bring it up objectively, as something that can be discussed unemotionally, without triggering lethal interviewer defensiveness.

2. Acknowledge your age as a basis for emphasizing the experience of a lifetime and the value that such experience can provide to any employer. Concentrate on describing how business has changed

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over the course of years and how deftly you have adapted to those changes and incorporated new ideas and technical advancements into your work performance.

3. Acknowledge common misperceptions about the weaknesses of age: hard-to-break habits, lack of flexibility, technological ignorance, and distrust of authority, especially if young. Then use your sales ability to eliminate those misperceptions, probably already resonating in the interviewer's head.

Habits: Remind your host of the ability to adapt and reshape yourself which has kept your thinking young. Stress your relish for new challenges and innovative approaches. Cite some examples from your past about how smoothly you have been able to change to new workflows and procedures.

Flexibility: Discuss your dislike of unproductive routine and your preference for trying new methods of approaching tasks. Stress those times in the past when you were able to develop creative solutions to long-term problems and how your resourcefulness helped your previous employers.

Technology: Identify new technical advances within your field and address how you have internalized those changes. If you have successfully transitioned from dictating to a secretary to email and instant messaging, if you have moved from a manual adding machine to competent computer literacy, then small changes like learning new software or novel production systems should be a snap.

Authority issues: You have attained authority in the past and you have also worked under a variety of supervisors in your long career life. Clarify your relationship with power: the respect you extend to those who are knowledgeable, the loyalty and support you offer any leader of your team, the self-respect you enjoy which allows you to participate in group goals enthusiastically without feeling that you need to be in charge or command the top title.

4. Once you have demolished the myths of age, emphasize its strengths: reliability, mature judgment, lack of impulsivity, timeliness, a strong work ethic, and the ability to perform without outside distractions such as personal relationship problems, child commitments, and social responsibilities.

Undoubtedly, there are individuals out there who have their own issues with hiring someone who reminds them of their father or who have had problems in the past with an underperforming older worker who was difficult to terminate. There will always be those you cannot reach, no matter how convincing your logic and your presentation.

There are many more who are open-minded and seek not to make rash judgments. Address their semi-conscious fears face to face and the interview may end successfully – for both you and your lucky new employer.

Virginia Bola operated a rehabilitation company for 20 years, developing innovative job search techniques for disabled workers, while serving as a respected Vocational Expert in Administrative, Civil and Workers' Compensation Courts. Author of an interactive and emotionally supportive workbook, *The Wolf at the Door: An Unemployment Survival Manual*, and a monthly ezine, *The Worker's Edge*, she can be reached at <http://www.virginiabola.com>

Home Improvement: Ceiling Fans

By Shaan Randow

Ceiling fans come in a wide variety of styles and colors to match any homeowners interior design wishes. They come with and without lighting. Three to five blades. In colors of black, white, brown, made of wood, covered with animal print fabric or styled with carved leaves.

Ceiling fans have come a long way since the industrial revolution where they were dreamed up by sweating factory workers. These workers attached wooden or metal blades to the overhead whirling shafts that were used to drive the machinery they worked on.

Ceiling fans are a great way to keep cool in the summer on those nights when you don't have to run the air conditioner. Ceiling fans are much less noisy and obtrusive than box fans that sit on your floor or in your windows. And, you know that heat rises, right? Well, in the winter months running your fan on low and in reverse speed will bring down the heat that accumulates up in at the ceiling, helping you to feel warmer.

Before you purchase a ceiling fan you'll need to consider the blade sweep. You don't want to overwhelm a smaller room with a ceiling fan that's too big, but, you also want to make sure that the ceiling fan will be able to displace enough air to cool you off in a larger room. Another consideration before purchasing a ceiling fan is the length it will drop from the ceiling. A home with an 8 foot ceiling would probably use a three inch down rod for a ceiling fan, and a room with a fifteen foot high ceiling would need at least a one foot down rod, up to a five foot down rod. It is suggested that you have at least seven feet of clearance from the floor to avoid accidents.

Installing a ceiling fan yourself is a fairly easy job for most do-it-yourselfers. There are many online sites available to help you if you have any problems or questions.

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