

"50 Plus: The Challenges of Career Transition"

By Marva McGrew

In today's wavering economy, the American dream of retiring at age 50 and enjoying a beachside villa or countryside cottage until Kingdom comes will remain a fantasy for many.

Instead, the "golden years" will be met with a career change. Unfortunately, what brings about a sense of thrill and glee when a 30-something changes careers, can be a life crisis for a person who is in their fifties. Age, attitude, economy, aging parents, and technology are just a few of the many variables that can create tension during such a transition. Yet some 50-plus employees use this experience to explore different career paths, pursue dreams, or give back to the community. As a matter of fact, when counseling this population I have discovered their ambitious spirit. They desire to do something meaningful and purposeful; they want to make a difference in the lives of others. However, ambition can become lost in uncharted territory.

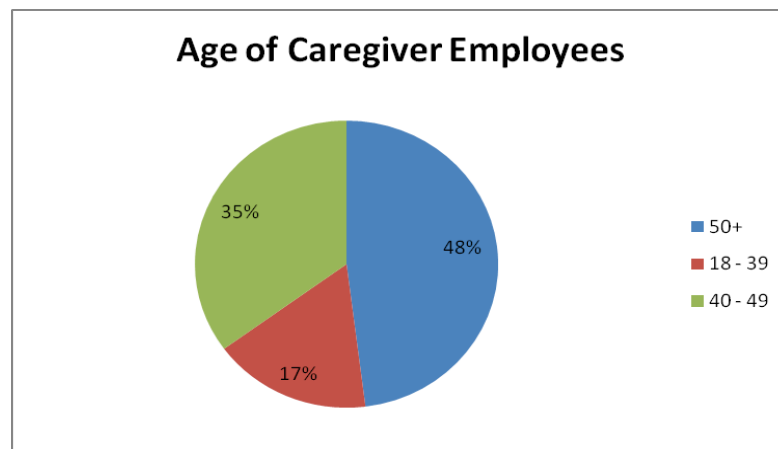
The most obvious variable in this complex process is age. Fifty-plus is not the typical age employers seek to hire. Usually veterans are used for training and consulting or are offered retirement packages. This unwritten expectation within the workforce may be a contributor to the influx of age discrimination claims over the past few years. According to the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), age discrimination claims are up by 15% from 2006. Although the Age Discrimination Act was established in 1975 as a means to protect individuals 40 and over from being denied employment due to age, the need to enforce this law today is greater than ever before (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

One's attitude about their age can also make a difference in earning a new position, receiving a promotion, or starting a business. I have counseled many 50-plus clients who embrace the task of job searching with pessimism due to their concern about age. Some also allow feelings of inadequacy and fear of being discriminated against to stifle their job application process. To overcome this victim mentality, I encourage them to identify and focus on the ways they can add value to a company or organization. By expanding their skills, qualifications, and experience with enthusiasm, one will be viewed as an asset, regardless of their age.

Likewise, one's attitude in response to disappointment or loss (e.g., overlooked for a promotion, unemployment) can heighten the degree to which one's transition is challenging. One very simple process to help recover positively from an obstacle is called Victim Versus Victor Triad. In a victim triad the following three parties exist: the perpetrator, the victim, and the rescuer. In a situation when the employer fires the employee, the employer is the perpetrator (this is what he did to me); the employee is the victim; and the individuals who the employee hopes to get them past this is the rescuer. In a victor triad, the employee is the victor; the employer is the challenger (provided an opportunity to express gifts and talents in other area or industries, or change career paths); and, the rescuer is the coach (provides guidance, counsel and resources). Employers are searching for individuals who possess the latter- people who are positive, passionate, and excited about their career. Thus, this population must take the additional steps to "brand" themselves.

“Personal branding is an identity that stimulates precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities the person stands for.” – Peter Montoya, author, personal branding expert (Goldsmith, 2009).

A great attitude coupled with a unique personal brand can better equip the 50 plus population to deal with the economic downturn. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), unemployment is at an average high of 8.8%. Many of the 50 plus are among those who have lost their jobs, which is devastating because of outstanding debts such as mortgage, car payment, college tuition, and medical bills. In addition, caretaking expenses often add to the financial strain. According to a Caregiver Cost Study conducted by MetLife, 48% of working caregivers are 50 plus (Metlife Mature Market Institute, 2010).



Resource: http://www.caregiving.org/data/Caregiver_Costs_Study_Web_FINAL_2-12-10.pdf

There are alarming statistics from National Alliance for Caregiving that supports this reality as well:

- *The typical family caregiver is a 49-year-old woman caring for her widowed 69-year-old mother who does not live with her.*

- *More than **65 million people**, 29% of the U.S. population, provide care for a chronically ill, disabled or aged family member or friend during any given year and spend an average of 20 hours per week providing care for their loved one.*
- ***20 hours per week** is the average number of hours, family caregivers spend caring for their loved ones while **13%** of family caregivers are providing 40 hours of care a week or more (Maass, 2008)*

Indeed, remaining hopeful during times of economic uncertainty can be the greatest challenge for older employee prospects.

Technology is another twist adding to the career transition complexity for those who are 50 plus. In the midst of all the economic chaos, the 50 plus population is trying to keep abreast of today's rapid, technological advances. During the past decade, technology transformed the job search and recruiting processes. Why is this a challenge for many who are 50 plus? The Baby Boomer (born between 1946 and 1964) generation is accustomed to searching for jobs in the newspaper and completing applications on-site. Many are uncomfortable with the on-line job search process and are not considered to be a tech-savvy generation. Nevertheless, computer-training opportunities are often offered through public libraries and community colleges. Thus, there is no reason for this generation to be left behind. Besides maintaining up-to-date computer skills, 50 plus job applicants should consider creating an account with online social networking groups such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter. Knowing how to connect the 21st century way can also help older adults remain competitive in the workforce.

Considering all of the variables including, **age**, **attitude**, the **economy**, **aging parents**, and **technology**, career transition can be challenging for those who are 50 plus. However,

anything worth doing is worth overcoming obstacles. The one variable that will make a difference in all areas is a positive attitude. The economy is what it is and so is age; but it is a positive attitude that will allow them to cope successfully.

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