

# AGEISM

## JOB SEARCH CHALLENGES FOR THE MATURE COMMUNICATOR



It happens every day. It's so common that an increasingly large percentage of workers in any profession (including communications) will experience it sometime in their career. The difference is that now it's you — it's your name on the pink slip. Restructuring... merging... closures... the reason really doesn't matter, but the result is the same: you're now in job-search mode. But let's add another wrinkle: you've surpassed the magic age of 50 and are now officially a member of the "mature worker" group.

Looking for work at that stage of life and career can be a challenge. The numerical age per se isn't the problem — it's the misconceptions often associated with it that can impede success in finding a job. So what are those misconceptions? While there are many, here are a few to consider:

According to Sylvia MacArthur, president of executive search firm Madison MacArthur,

"Often the hiring manager is younger than the applicant and they may think 'this person is going to replace me... I don't know how to manage somebody who's older than I am.' They may discount the value the person brings to the table because it's offset by a concern they could be hiring somebody more qualified than them."

The fact is, not all mature workers want to be the boss at a later stage of their life and career. "Government studies have shown that most employees 50 or older crave opportunities to do meaningful work at lower levels of responsibility," says Lisa Taylor, president of Challenge Factory, a Toronto-based innovative talent management and career services company. "But they don't want the meetings, they don't want the teams reporting to them [been there, done that], they are willing to take lower salaries commiserate with the level and type of work that they're doing. They want that to be part of a discussion with potential employers whereas the employer might think it's a taboo subject."

Another misconception is that older workers can't — or won't — keep up with new developments and technology in their field. Reaching a specific age or finding oneself unemployed doesn't mean you have lost your desire or ability to do so. Do you really think you can't teach an old dog new tricks? Communicators have had to embrace new technology and ways of doing things to keep ahead of the curve, and being an IABC member really helps with that; access to the resources and people is invaluable to any communicator of any age and at any stage of his or her career.

"Older workers need to demonstrate and showcase they are tech savvy," says MacArthur, "even if they're not asked specifically about that because there may be the assumption there's no point in asking."

Another misconception is that older workers, being in later stages of their career, won't really feel connected to a new job and they may continue looking for other opportunities. But in their generation, once you joined a company, you were there for life. Older workers are still

of that mindset to some degree. But for today's generation, that paradigm has radically changed to the point where young people entering the workforce will have several different careers during their lifetime. It has become common, if not the norm, for younger workers to change positions and companies and industries every few years.

"Over time, young people have recognized what's happened with their parents and realize there's little loyalty anymore and that more mature people were brought up with a sense of loyalty to the company but the company wasn't loyal to them," says MacArthur. "Young people want to explore, they want to try different things so it's a very different mindset."

Workers of an older generation have a different mindset and they don't want to keep changing jobs. They have a certain "stick-to-itiveness" and given the chance, they can provide the consistency and longevity that will allow companies to see their plans to the end.

"There's ageism without any doubt — it's rampant through certain organizations," says Taylor. "It's not necessarily intentional but it's a factor that exists. It's a challenge older workers have to deal with."



*Dave Watt is currently the sole proprietor of Watt's the Word Communications and copy editor for Communicator. His communications experience includes internal, strategic and change-management communications with BMO Financial group and media and public relations with Universal Music Group (Canada).*