



South Seattle Community College  
Career Development Services

*Mid-Life Career Changing in the New Economy*

## **INDEX: MID-LIFE CAREER CHANGES IN THE NEW ECONOMY**

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## OVERVIEW:

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This packet is designed to help individuals analyze and understand the problem of 'Ageism', how age discrimination affects their job search and most importantly what they can do to empower themselves and find meaningful work in this difficult job market.

***"Thirty year retirements, in the era of the Great Recession? Let's face it, that is simply not going to work, nor is it desirable..."***

→ Tough economic times and an aging population are changing how we approach retirement.

***"...Does it makes sense for society to throw away the most experienced segment of the population when it is a long way from obsolescence?..."***

→ *In the past, society pushed older workers into the 'Golden Years', even if they were not ready. Yet, people need and sometimes want to work longer.*

***"...The surge of people into this new stage of life is one of the most important social phenomena of the new century..."***

→ *This prompts a paradigm shift in which the 'Golden Years' meet the 'Encore Years' and the issue of 'Age' becomes very important.*

***"...Never before have so many people had so much experience and the time and the capacity to do something significant with it."***

→ *The result is a realization that, though problems like 'Ageism' are real, the potential for Mid-Life workers to contribute and THRIVE in the new workforce is also very real!*

Marc Freedman  
*The Big Shift:*

*Navigating the New Stage Beyond Mid Life*  
p. 14, 16)

**So, how do we make this happen?**

## Myths about Ageism

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**Myth:** *“If you don’t get a job and you are older it must be age discrimination...”*

**Reality:** *Job seekers often make mistakes in their job search long before ageism can occur.*

**Example:** Employers scan resumes for 5-10 seconds. Resumes not targeted are discarded.

**Myth:** *“Older workers are always discriminated against...”*

**Reality:** *Age is still an asset. Most companies still appreciate experience. Most teams still have older workers on them.*

**Example:** Companies like Weyerhaeuser, Boeing and Home Depot actually have programs in place to retain and hire older workers. Like all job seekers, it is best for older workers to focus on **‘company cultures’**, NOT ‘job titles.’ You will probably not be happy working for a company that does not share your values.

[http://www.aarp.org/work/employee-benefits/best\\_employers/](http://www.aarp.org/work/employee-benefits/best_employers/)

**Myth:** *“Age discrimination is always about ‘AGE’...”*

**Reality:** *Ageism is often a euphemism for other concerns:*

**Employers are often ‘afraid’:**

- You will not be adaptable.
- You will not be manageable.
- You will not be good with technology.
- You are overqualified and you will ‘jump ship.’

The trick is to address these specific fears. Targeted cover letters, resumes and interview answers that show you as adaptable, team oriented and good with technology often eliminate age discrimination at its roots.

**Myth:** *‘The Wage/Age Dilemma’—you save money by paying younger workers less...*

**Reality:** *Older workers often need less training and have the experience to do the job better and faster.*

**Myth:** *You have to be ‘old’ to suffer from Ageism...*

**Reality:** *Age is relative and can be used as a basis for discrimination against both ‘young’ and ‘old.’*

**Myth:** *Older people are not respected in our society...*

**Reality:** *Recent studies show that the United States is one of the least ageist societies.*

**Myth:** *Older workers cost more money through lost time and health care expenses...*

**Reality:** *Younger workers tend to still have children at home, which results in more lost time and health care expenses. They also have more accident related injuries that result in longer time out.*

## **The Reality of Age Discrimination in the Job Market**

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### **The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/adea.cfm>**

Age discrimination shares similarities with other forms of negative discrimination like racism and sexism.

- Stereotypes about populations make it difficult to see real individual people.
- Finding a job is all about your personal story. You will not find meaningful work if your personal story is stifled by stereotypes and generalizations.

Ageism is possible in each phase of a job search.

Age discrimination can creep into cover letters, resumes, interviews and the hiring process.

- Some basic tricks for avoiding these pitfalls:
  - Play to your strengths
  - Alleviate their fears
  - Take out information you do not need or that will obviously 'date' you. (Be cautious!)

Ask Yourself: How is the movement against Age Discrimination like other movements against injustice?

### **What can I do to overcome Ageism and find meaningful work? 10-step method for combating Ageism and turning 'age' into an asset:**

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1. Make space for yourself
2. Practice self-reflexivity
3. Develop your Brand
4. Know your market
5. Establish a job plan
6. Establish and LIVE a networking strategy
7. Use technology and keep learning
8. Anticipate problems and seek solutions before you need them
9. Help others, be open for advice and volunteer
10. STAY RELEVANT! Set the pace for others to follow

## **Skills Mid-Life Job Seekers Need to Overcome Ageism and Find Meaningful Work**

### **1. Make space for yourself**

Balance your emotions:

- Emotions drive our job search. Therefore, success in any job search is inseparably connected with the emotions of the job seeker. This is especially true when it comes to mid-life career changes. Positive and energetic job seekers find work faster than those who dwell on their problems. Yet, we all have negative feelings when we are unemployed. So, what can we do?

HEALTH: Doctors will tell you there are 2 things that are linked to ALL health issues...  
**Diet and Exercise**—small changes here provide a stronger emotional base to work from.

HAPPINESS: When you start to feel depressed, desperate or insecure, take a break from your job search and do something you love. Seek out positive things.

ACTION: When you return to your job search, do not fixate on the problems at hand...start to look for specific solutions!

Get help with finances:

- You paid taxes so that support systems are in place to help you when you are unemployed. Use them. Government programs, unemployment, public assistance and community organizations offer temporary relief. <http://www.seekingwdc.org/workforce/older-workers.html>
- Tool like the Self Sufficiency calculator are there to help you balance your budget and also to find financial resources. <http://www.thecalculator.org/>

Take advantage of this 'Cross Roads' moment:

- Successful mid life career changers have a 'Gap Year' between jobs that helps amplify perspective.
- 'Liminality' is as important as 'structure' in our lives.

### **2. Practice self-reflexivity**

- Many find it hard to be 'self-reflexive' (navel gazing).
- After 20 years in one career it can be hard to see options.
- Ask yourself, what do I do for fun? What really makes me happy? What have I enjoyed the most out of all the jobs I have held?
- Use career coaches, career guidance tools and advice from people you trust to help determine who you really are and what your real strengths are.

Passion + interest + abilities = meaningful work

**See ACTIVITY SHEET 1: Fill in the circles with 5-10 answers to each question.**

### 3. Develop your Brand.

- To be happy at work, we have to have passion.
- Passion comes from knowing our personal story.
- The unique combination of transferable skills, values, interests and abilities that we possess is our story. It is our...

## BRAND

Your brand should be:

**S** - imple

**A** - ppropriate

**M** - emorable



If you do not take your Brand seriously, no one else will.

- Develop a 30 second commercial (elevator speech).
- Answer the question: "How are others seeing me?"
- Adapt your message to the audience at hand.
- Use your brand to specifically combat Ageism.

### 4. Know your market

Your Brand will connect with certain companies and not with others.

- Compare REI (stewardship, community, sustainability operations) and Boeing (leadership, integrity, quality). They have different values they focus on. You can only find this out by researching.
- Why waste time with organizations that do not share your values?
- There are actually shortages in many career fields! Understand 'in demand' jobs, eligible training programs and funding options. <http://www.careerbridge.wa.gov/>

**See ACTIVITY SHEET 2: Gauge how your interests and skills align with the market.**

## 5. Establish a job plan

- Attend 'The New Job Search in the New Economy' workshop.
- Use the 3 'strategies for success' to combat Ageism and grow your Brand.  
(Be a 'solution focused,' 'systems thinker' who 'adds value'.)
- "Improvise, adapt and overcome"...some employers think you are stubborn...are you?

Try to look at things from different angles...

[http://www.stolaf.edu/services/cel/Alumni/Your\\_Path\\_to\\_Success.pdf](http://www.stolaf.edu/services/cel/Alumni/Your_Path_to_Success.pdf)

('Flow Chart' article in the US News and World Report)

## 6. Establish and LIVE a networking strategy

- Attend the "Effective Networking for the New Economy" workshop.
- Use your wealth of knowledge, experience and contacts to your advantage!
- Networking allows for you to become an individual again...let them see you and not some stereotype.

**Remember: "People Hire People They Know!"**

## 7. Use technology and keep learning

- The point is not to try and 'appear young' or become a 'slave to technology.'
- The point is to 'leverage' tools to your advantage.
- Social networking sites like [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) can serve as a hub to continue to build your brand.  
(notice that this is step 7 and not step number 1)

## 8. Anticipate problems and seek solutions before you need them.

- Finding a job is a FULL TIME job and probably the toughest job you will ever have.
- How do successful people spend most of their time? (preparation)
- If you are busying yourself with research, learning about your industry, growing your Brand and networking, you will notice obstacles in your path long before you get to them.

**Amplify your perspective and you will find meaningful work.**

## 9. Help others, be open for advice and volunteer!

- The best networkers help others.
- Most jobs are filled because..."people hire people they know!"
- If you are active in your community and industry and open to new ideas, people will take notice.  
Volunteering, AmeriCorps, affinity groups, job clubs and so on are not just for first time job seekers any more...

**10. STAY RELEVANT! Set the pace for others to follow.**

- What does it mean to set the pace for others to follow?
- How can I add value to everything I do?
- Notice trends, accept change, follow movements that you believe in.
- Remember: The new movement is toward an acceptance of the true value of the 'Encore Years.'

Mid-life can be the time when all your skills, experience and passion reach their highest potential!

**Suggested Reading List and Helpful Resources:**

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**Books:**

*The Big Shift: Navigating the New Stage Beyond Mid Life*, Marc Freedman

*Your Next Career: Do What You've Always Wanted to Do*, Gail Geary

*Finding Your Very Next Best Work Life: Strategies for Successful Career Change*, Martha Mangelsdorf

*Guerrilla Marketing for Job Seekers*, Jay Levinson and David Perry

Resource list

**Internet Resources:**

Need help with basic job search skills? (i.e. Creating a Job Plan, Resumes, Interviewing, Networking)

<http://worksource.southseattle.edu/jobs.aspx>

<http://www.kcls.org/looktoyourlibrary/>

Proof that employers NEED older workers:

<http://www.employexperience.com/>

"Developing the Workforce as It Matures." Emerging Models and Lessons from the Mid-point of the Aging Worker Initiative –

<http://www.compete.org/publications/detail/1679/developing-the-workforce-as-it-matures/>

Bridging the Skills Gap: Why Mature Workers Matter - by Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Council on Competitiveness, 2009. <http://www.cael.org/pdf/BridgingtheSkillsGap.pdf>

Regional Economic and Workforce Strategies: A Focus on the Mature Workforce New Opportunities for Meeting Skill Needs – by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the Council on Competitiveness, 2009. <http://www.cael.org/pdf/Regional-Economic-and-Workforce-StrategiesTMT.pdf>

Timing of Retirement and the Current Economic Crisis. by the The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College, Fact Sheet, August 2009. [http://www.bc.edu/research/agingandwork/archive\\_pubs/FS25.html](http://www.bc.edu/research/agingandwork/archive_pubs/FS25.html)

The "New Unemployables": Older Job Seekers Struggle to Find Work During the Great Recession. Comparing the Job Search, Financial, and Emotional Experiences of Older and Younger Unemployed Americans – by Maria Heidkamp, Nicole Corre, and Carl E. Van Horn. The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College, Issue Brief, [http://www.bc.edu/research/agingandwork/archive\\_pubs/IB25.html](http://www.bc.edu/research/agingandwork/archive_pubs/IB25.html)



**Activity Sheet 1: Identifying Transferable Skills**

**What do I love to do?**

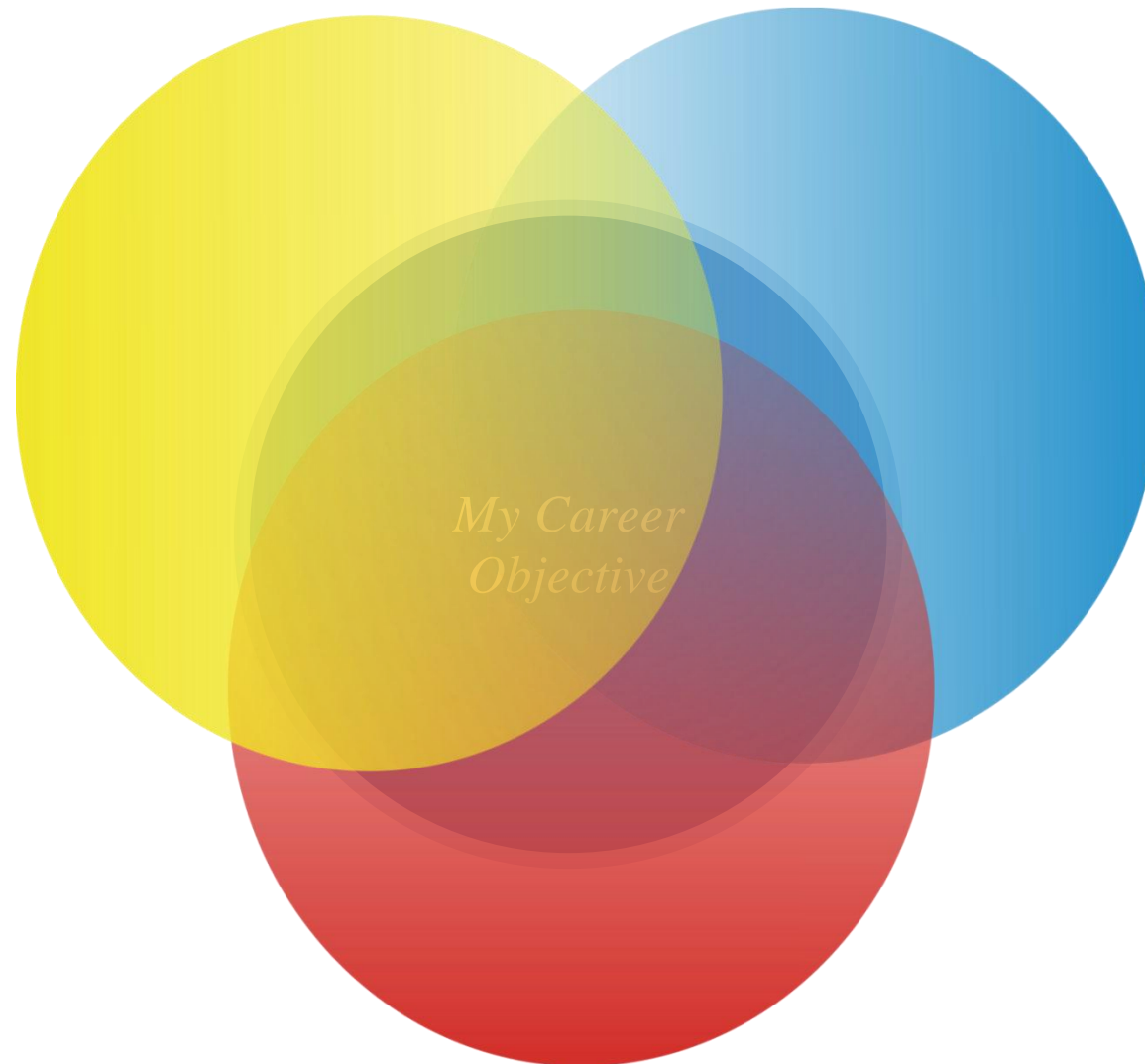
**What am I good at?**

**What have I enjoyed about past jobs?**

## Activity Sheet 2: How do I know which career is right for me?

**What do I love to do?**

**What am I good at?**



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"Start Here. Go Anywhere."

**What jobs are actually out there?**