

10 tips for finding a job after 50



David Woo/Staff Photographer

Marsha Meyers, a 66-year-old retired college counselor, works at the Container Store in Dallas.

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Looking for a job is hard work — and it's even harder if you're age 50 or older.

Older workers were hard-hit during the 2007-09 recession, leading to high long-term unemployment. The job market has improved, but challenges remain.

In Texas in 2015, the average unemployment rate was 3 percent for people age 55-64 and 3.7 percent for those 65-plus, the latest government data available. It was 4.4 percent for all ages statewide.

"While the numbers are encouraging, people are pouring through our doors and struggling more than ever," says Claire Turner, director of senior employment at the Senior Source in Dallas.

"There's definitely ageism and there's hidden unemployment — as in people's unemployment benefits have expired, they never filed for unemployment or they've stopped looking for work."

At the same time, many baby boomers ages 52 to 70 this year aren't ready to retire yet or can't afford to do so. They're also healthier and living longer, which means they may be working longer into their golden years. Today's average retirement age is 63.

So, how can older workers improve their chances of finding work?

Social media

Technology has changed the job search and recruiting process since some 50-plus people may have last looked for work. Job matchmaking is done on the professional networking site LinkedIn. Interviews are done via Skype.

If you don't have a LinkedIn profile, get one.

"One of the first things employers will do is look at your social media profiles to know about you," says Michael Herndon, vice president of financial resilience for AARP. "Think of it as your brand. If your LinkedIn photo is a surfer sign on a beach with a drink, that's the first thing [employers] are going to think."

Job seekers also can use LinkedIn and other social media and websites to research where they want to work. It also helps to be active on social media.



Volunteering

Given the crowded field, it's important to have a clear message to share about yourself and project a confident image, experts say. Older workers also must show their flexibility.

Dallas newcomer Beverly Miles, 54, credits her success finding a job to volunteering where she wanted to work first.

"You may have a desire to work, but not everyone is hiring," said Miles, who has a bachelor's degree in behavioral science and experience in education and social services. "If you say you'll work for free, they'll snap you up. That's how you get your foot in the door."

In February, Miles began volunteering for Richland College's Emeritus plus 50 Program. In March, the school hired her when a part-time position opened to teach adult education. In August, she began work as a behavioral preventionist and visitor supervisor for Hour Family Texas in Dallas.

Staying sharp

Experts also say job seekers must freshen their resume and sharpen their interview skills to help land that hard-to-get job interview.

"Selling yourself is hard," says Gene Burnard, publisher of Senior Job Bank, a 50-plus online career site. "Focus on what you will tell the interviewer about what value you can bring to the company, not what you've done in the past."



Marsha Meyers thinks her interview skills helped her get hired as a salesperson by the Container Store about a year ago. "My enthusiasm showed through," says the 66-year-old Dallas resident. "I spoke about how I could learn easily and that I was a team player. I like to help people find solutions to problems."

Her Coppel-based employer says attitude and knowledge of the company and its products make a difference.

"We're looking for those people who are passionate about what they do," says recruiting director Karyn Alvarez. Baby boomers comprise more than a quarter of the Container Store's national workforce, she says.

Help wanted

Older workers tend to be unemployed longer. Government data in June showed that Americans age 45-64 were unemployed an average of 37 weeks and those 65-plus were out of work for 38 weeks, compared with less than 26 weeks for all ages. Most workers age 55 to 70 stop looking within a year if they haven't found work, according to a 2014 report by Boston College's Center for Retirement Research.

However, the situation may be improving.

AARP analysis found that the looming wave of baby boomer retirements combined with an inadequate worker pipeline and growing service demands means that certain industries, such as health care, may need to retain older workers.

And more than two-thirds of companies had trouble filling full-time jobs because candidates didn't have the required experience and more than half said they lacked basic skills, according to a recent report by the Society for Human Resource Management.

"Employers are going to need you and need your expertise and wisdom," AARP's Herndon says about older workers.

Tips for 50-plus job seekers

- 1. Don't go solo.** Take advantage of free help available. Network with colleagues, industry contacts, friends and social media connections.
- 2. Frame the message.** Focus on your strengths. Share a clear message with potential employers.
- 3. Be flexible.** Show that you're open to change. Stress what value you can bring to a company.
- 4. Redo your resume.** If you're switching careers or re-entering the workforce, create a resume that focuses on skills rather than chronological experience. Find a sample resume on AARP's website.
- 5. Make LinkedIn your friend.** A LinkedIn profile is your online resume. Keep it short and use an appropriate photo and strong keywords.
- 6. Stay connected on social media.** It's a must. Be active on social media, but keep a professional image. Find a tutorial on AARP's website.
- 7. Keep current on the job market.** Learn about the places where you want to work through online and social media research and visits to a branch office or store.
- 8. Volunteer.** Consider volunteering where you want to work to see if it's a good fit for all.
- 9. Work on your interview skills.** Learn to sell yourself. Tell a company what value you will bring to it, not what you've done in the past.
- 10. Smile.** Project a positive, professional and personable attitude.

SOURCES: AARP; Karyn Alvarez; Gene Burnard; *The Dallas Morning News* research; Marsha Meyers; Beverly Miles; the Senior Source