

Rethinking Retirement: Tips for older job searchers

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(Photo: Victoria Arocho for USA TODAY)

"Retirement job" seems like an oxymoron. And yet a growing number of Americans say that they plan to continue to work during their retirement years.

Unfortunately, finding employers willing to hire them is not easy.

"The elephant in the workplace is still age bias," says Tim Driver, founder and CEO of RetirementJobs.com. "Because of the Baby Boomers and the lower birth rates of younger people, job supply and demand will eventually favor mature workers. But that is still some time off."

The demand for older workers has only declined during the recession as many of them have lost their jobs. Last year, the unemployment rate of Americans 65 and older was 6.2%, up from 3.1% in 2007, says AARP Public Policy Institute, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"It's not easy for an older unemployed worker to find a job, nor is it easy for an older retiree to return to the workforce," says Sara Rix, senior strategic policy adviser at the AARP Public Policy Institute. "In this economy the employer is going to say, 'I can get two younger workers for the same price as one older worker.'"

RETIREMENT LIVING: [Boomers turn to encore careers after retiring \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/columnist/brooks/2013/03/25/retirement-career-boomer-entrepreneur/2005727/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/columnist/brooks/2013/03/25/retirement-career-boomer-entrepreneur/2005727/)

HEALTH CARE: [Concerns about costs in retirement are off the charts \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/columnist/brooks/2013/04/22/retirement-health-insurance-401k/2096807/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/columnist/brooks/2013/04/22/retirement-health-insurance-401k/2096807/)

In March, 51% of job seekers 55 and older were unemployed for 27 weeks or longer, compared with 41.7% of those ages 25 to 54, according to the AARP Public Policy Institute's analysis of the federal Current Population Survey.

Many unemployed older Americans who are cash-strapped and need to keep earning money cannot be rehired because they have not kept up their skills. Others want to find a new career that would give them more flexibility and help them stay engaged and make a difference in life.

At least there are a number of programs and websites aimed at helping older job seekers. A program called the [Plus 50 Initiative \(http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu/Pages/Default.aspx\)](http://plus50.aacc.nche.edu/Pages/Default.aspx) was launched by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2008. "We started doing personal enrichment classes, volunteering activities and workforce training," says Mary Sue Vickers, director for the Plus 50 Initiative.

But because of the economic collapse, the program decided to focus only on workforce training. "It helps meet the needs of adults 50 and older, and it increases their prospects in high-demand fields," Vickers says.

Dory Brinker, who lives in Brewster, Mass., has decided to go to the Cape Cod Community College to study human services alcohol and drug abuse counseling. She seldom thinks about her age until she is in the classroom and the other students are 50 years younger than she is.

Brinker will turn 70 in October. Over the years the former teacher has also raised three children and owned a nursing school. She always wanted to get a master's degree and Ph.D. "But when the kids were growing up, I got too busy," she says.

Now she works part time at a shelter for families who are recovering from alcohol or drug abuse. And when she finishes the program at the community college, she plans to go on for a college degree. "I love school," she says. "The job means a lot to me and I'm not sitting home bored."

Brinker found out about the shelter through people she knew. But for most older Americans, jobs don't just fall into their laps. "Typically, they have to pound the pavement, or today's equivalent, which is sending out loads and loads of résumés," Rix says.

In part, older workers have a harder time finding work because they are less efficient in networking and using social media. And many employers believe that older workers lack creativity and are generally unwilling to learn new things, says an Urban Institute 2012 report.

Seniors need to better use job-search tools and know what type of employers are most likely to hire older job seekers. The Plus 50 Initiative at community colleges has focused on health care, education and social service because that will increase their job prospects in high-demand fields, Vickers says.

Currently, workers who were 65 and older tend to work in retail, professions, education and health services, says AARP, based on the 2012 Current Population Survey. Fewer worked for the information sector, which includes telecommunications.

The one industry category where age bias doesn't exist is elder care, Driver says. His firm has launched a separate service where families can find high-quality certified elder care providers.

And to make the job search easier for older Americans, RetirementJobs.com has a certified age-friendly employer program. About 100 major companies have been identified as among the best places for employees above age 50. And AARP has a program for the best employers for workers over 50.

The Plus 50 Incentive can help older Americans improve themselves and make major career changes. For many years, Patricia Zimmer, who lives in St. Louis, was a stay-at-home mom who home-schooled her children. She is now 58, the kids are grown and she is divorced.

Recently Zimmer started the patient care technician program at St. Louis Community College. "It is something that I had wanted to do for 20 years," she says. "I'm also doing it out of necessity. But I wanted to do something that would stretch me."

As Baby Boomers approach retirement age they realize that they may be living well into their 80s or 90s. And many of them don't want to spend 30 years sitting on their porch. But they probably don't want to continue doing the same job they've had for 20 or 30 years.

They have a different mindset, and they will be creating a new retirement job world. "We're only a little way into this phenomenon," Driver says. "It is playing itself out before our eyes. And the more it happens, the more culturally accepted it is for someone with gray hair to be in an office cubicle."