

90 DAYS | SEPTEMBER 2, 2008

Finding a New Position As a Mature Job Hunter

By SARAH E. NEEDLEMAN

Searching for a job when you're 50 or older requires a different approach than a typical search. You're likely to seek opportunities higher up on the corporate ladder and may face perceived age bias. To succeed, you need to plan ahead, asserts Lynne A. Sarikas, director of the M.B.A. career center at Northeastern University in Boston. Consider this advice to secure a new position:

Prepare mentally. Anticipate rejection and plan for a longer job search. It takes an average of 22 weeks for someone over 55 to find a new job, compared with 16 weeks for younger workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Having the appropriate expectation level helps very much with maintaining your self esteem, attitude and energy level for what may very well be an anxiety-laden process," says Dave Opton, president and founder of Execunet.com, a networking site.

Target niche recruiters. Let executive-search professionals who specialize in your industry or job function know you're on the market, advises Howard Seidel, a partner at Essex Partners, a Boston career-transition firm. Executive recruiters fill high-level positions and are skilled in working with experienced hires. Get a referral from someone in your field or search for one at recruiterlink.com, onlinerecruitersdirectory.com, searchfirm.com or i-recruit.com.

Make new connections. Broaden your networking circle to boost your odds of getting referrals and news about openings. The higher up the career ladder you are, the fewer open spots you will find, which is why making personal connections is critical. Networking sites for senior professionals such as Execunet, LinkedIn.com, Netshare.com and Plaxo.com foster conversation, and many of their members are executive recruiters. Execunet, for example, features discussion forums, including one for swapping job leads.

Get tech savvy. If you haven't yet figured out what text messaging, instant messaging, social networking and other tech-related activities are all about, now is the time, says Roy Cohen, a career counselor and executive coach in New York. Employers are increasingly using these tools in their business strategies and for communicating in the workplace. Showing you're familiar with them may help you make a favorable impression, he says.

Curb age bias. You can address some of the common, unspoken predispositions that hiring managers may have about senior candidates -- like fears that older workers lack energy or are already looking ahead to retirement -- says Mr. Opton. Casually reveal information to counteract that, he explains. You might say, "I'm sorry I wasn't in when you called...I was in the middle of a six-mile jog." Everything from your hair to your shoes should convey your status as a successful professional, says Susan Sommers, a business image coach in New York. Covering up gray hair isn't necessary, but a contemporary style avoids the impression "that you're stuck in the past," she says.

Write to Sarah E. Needleman at sarah.needleman@wsj.com