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FOR MORE INFORMATION

JUDY ANN MICHAEL

email: Judy@JudyAnnMichael.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/judyannmichael

I'M OVER 50: 10 JOB SEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FRONT LINES

In my previous articles, I chronicled my job search as part of what I refer to as *RetireMyth #3, If I get laid off, I can still get a job right?* Is part of my book *Living the 10 RetireMyths: An Unconventional Journey in Retirement Planning*. Easily getting a job at or near the end of your career, despite your great experience, can prove to be difficult even in a robust economy. After submitting nearly 80 applications and networking, I received 0 offers over the course of 12 months. It was an interesting journey that led me to becoming an entrepreneur, writer, and business coach because I got a zero results on my job search efforts.

I learned that you still need to put your best foot forward and be competitive with the rest of the crowd. A perfect resume, complete LinkedIn profile, and tailored, keyword-rich job applications are the *minimum* requirements for a successful job search. Expanding your contacts, accumulating certifications, and highlighting your best experiences are essential for connecting with potential employers.

Based on my experience, as well as my interactions with other Baby Boomers who are submitting hundreds of applications for jobs, I recommend the following tips to remain sane and productive. It will take time for you to *search* for a job, *find* a job, and then finally *land* a job. Below are my Top 10 Recommendations to help you through what may feel like the longest year of your life.

TOP 10 JOB SEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FRONT LINES FOR THE OVER-50 JOB SEEKER

1. **Grow a Thick Skin** – You will receive rude replies, automated replies, but mostly no replies at all. It's not you, just a lot of busy people trying to do their jobs, and automation that gets in the way. You will hear that you are too old, have the wrong experience, not enough certifications, stayed too long at your last employer, or you haven't worked at the best companies. Don't let it get to you.
2. **Keep Up Your Momentum** – Once you have your job search momentum going, keep it up. I found that as I continued networking, I met new people, explored new interests, and even had some fun. It fed the positive emotional energy I needed to keep sending resumes and dealing with negative responses.
3. **Accept that the Past is Over** – Highlight what you've done lately and don't muddy the waters with what you did 10 or more years ago. Twenty years ago, I helped design the first UPS global distribution system. It was a proud moment in my career, but no one cares about that accomplishment today.
4. **Create Your Leads Machine** – As an over-50 job seeker, you are in search of job leads much like a sales person is in search of sales leads. There is a tendency to stop creating leads, and stop searching, especially if you are granted a phone interview or an in-person interview with a hiring manager. Don't put all your eggs in one basket by relying on one great interview. The other job

candidates think they had a great interview too. As soon as you are done with that interview, create the next lead. You will learn that “hurry up and wait” is a theme you will constantly deal with while waiting for companies to make hiring decisions. Don’t wait. Stay calm. Keep moving.

5. **Have One Year of Cash Flow on Hand** – National statistics (and my personal experience) show that it may be over a year before you, as an over-50 job seeker, to get a new full-time job. If you are not working, figure out what you will do to financially support you and your loved ones. Trim expenses immediately and look for project or part time work to buffer the blow of not receiving a paycheck.
6. **Understand Your Energy Level** – Not only do you need to know your financial needs, but your energy needs as well. Are you ready to commute two or more hours a day? Do you have the stamina for 60-hour work weeks? Can you compete with workers half your age? Understand what time and energy you are willing to commit to a new position. Adjust your expectations and targeted positions to meet your energy level.
7. **Grow Your Network** – Face to face meetings are still the best connections. You’ll get new ideas and even more connections. If you have a full-time job, keep expanding your network weekly. The best question to ask at the end of the meeting is, “What can I do for you?”. It allows you to give back to the person who took time to meet with you.
8. **Turn Fear into Productivity** – At first, you may experience a panic attack from not receiving a paycheck. You may feel constant pressure from your family to get a job. Fear of the unknown is omnipresent, so develop habits that not only support but challenge you. Try a new exercise program to burn off the stress. Find creative uses for your time, like completing long overdue projects at home. Pursue a new certification. Fear is debilitating unless you find productive uses for your pent-up energy. During my time off, I improved my health, downsized my home, wrote two books, passed two licensing exams, and helped my friends – in addition to job searching.
9. **It’s Not Final Until the Ink is Dry** – As a VP of Sales once told me, “it’s never a sale until the contract is signed.” The same is true for your job search. You might have interviewed with the CEO, had HR check your references, and received all the signals that seem to indicate that you are hired. At the last minute, they may change the position, downsize the company, or choose another candidate. Don’t celebrate until you sign your job offer and all is in order.
10. **Turn Revelations into Reinvention** – My personal revelation is that my days of climbing the corporate ladder are over. I realized that I won’t be the next C-Suite occupant, unless it is the leader of my own company. It is time to pursue a new career direction that will sustain me for several decades. You may have similar revelations that motivate you to reinvent yourself and explore new directions. Assess what your passion and skills are and if they can be applied in a new industry. Your corporate experience may be transferable to the non-profit or public sectors. Or, like many experienced workers, you may choose to monetize your experience and become an entrepreneur.

Finally, I want to answer the question, “Are you telling me my career is over?” For me, the answer was “Yes”, but it didn’t mean my *life* was over. Despite the hundreds of hours of effort, I did not receive any job offers, so I had to reinvent myself and go off in a new direction. Your results may be different. You might know hundreds of people, enjoy where you currently work, or have a unique skill that everyone wants. My final advice is to keep marketing yourself and networking. Become your own best salesperson by educating yourself, expanding your skills, and connecting with others. You might work at the same company for 20 years, but if they close their doors tomorrow, you need to have the *visibility*, not just the talent, to get a new position.

Judy Ann Michael, MBA, is an author, speaker, and business coach. Her new book, *Living the 10 Retiremyths: An Unconventional Journey in Retirement*, is now available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNobles.com. For more information on her business coaching services, events, and books please visit JudyAnnMichael.com.