

The Five O'Clock News[®]

from America's Premier Career-Coaching and Outplacement Service

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"One organization with a long record of success in helping people find jobs is The Five O'Clock Club."

FORTUNE

Celebrating 25 years—
America's Premier
Career Coaching and
Outplacement Network for
Professionals, Managers
and Executives

Is Age Discrimination the Problem?



"Having past accomplishments on your resume is fine. However, a smiley face in kindergarten might be going a little too far back."

Or Is It Just a Bad Job Search?

by David Madison, Ph.D.,
Director, The National Guild of
Five O'Clock Club Career Coaches

In this issue

- ◆ Successful Over-50 Job Hunters
- ◆ Kate and Dale Talk Jobs
- ◆ The Old Gray Mares are Getting Better

The Old Gray Mares

THEY'RE BETTER THAN THEY USED TO BE

Fifty isn't as old as it used to be. Bill and Hillary are almost 60; Jane Fonda is turning 70!

The average American today is living 29 years longer than he or she did a century ago—but those years are being tacked on to middle age, not old age. Middle-aged people today are in better health and are planning to work longer than ever before. Many have whole new careers in front of them!

Lydia Bronte, author of *The Longevity Factor*, conducted a study of the careers of people over 50. Almost half of the participants had a major career peak after age 50. For example, Julia Child wrote *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* when she was almost 50, and then her career took off. About one-third of the study participants had major career peaks after the age of 65!

Those over 50 experience job searches that take just a few weeks longer than do the searches of those under 50. If a person wants to work, what can he or she do?

1. Decide how many more years you want to work. If it's only five years, you can try to stay in your current field. But if you want to work for 20 more years—as many do—develop a plan that you find exciting.

2. Think about how you want to live during those years. Here are a few examples:

- Steve had done what others wanted all his life, and now he thought it was time to do what *he* wanted. He just didn't know what that was. At age 61, it took him six months of planning to start his own consulting business. He's having more fun than

he ever thought possible. And he has flexible hours so he can spend time with his grandchildren and run marathons in Bermuda!

- Gerry, at age 55, decided to move from his banking job into private banking, which is a growth field and one where age is a plus. He became a certified financial planner, and is now targeting 14 companies, trying to decide which would be best for him.

- Janet, at age 52, wanted to get into the hospitality field. She got a job in event planning at a major accounting firm through a temporary placement agency. She's now full-time in the field she wanted.

- Art, in his late 50s, had been a general manager of top radio stations. He now helps a major company set up new radio affiliates—and is moving towards ownership.

3. Pay attention to image—get new clothes, if need be.

4. Appear energetic—talk about going skiing or hang-gliding (just kidding).

5. Be willing to pitch in—don't see anything as beneath you.

6. Exploit your age and experience! “I hope you want a mature person; someone who's been around the block ...” Many companies that are overrun with kids want a few gray heads around to call on the big corporate clients and help the company to avoid the big mistakes.

7. Don't confuse age prejudice with salary prejudice. If people don't want you because you cost too much, then don't moan about being too old. Address the salary issue and intensify your search to find someone who is willing to pay you what

you are worth.

8. Look into organizations with fewer than 1,000 employees. These need people who can hit the ground running.

9. Learn new skills now. Don't think, “I'll learn after they hire me.” Take courses. Join associations. Consider consulting or part-time work to learn more.

10. Don't use your age as an excuse. Maybe the problem is something else. Try to figure out what it is.

11. And don't give up! The folks featured in our magazine this month didn't! ●

Kate Wendleton
President and Editor-in-Chief



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Article submissions based on 5OCC methodology are welcome. There is no guarantee of publication. All submissions become the property of The Five O'Clock Club, Inc.



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Is Age Discrimination the Problem?

Or Is It Just a Bad Job Search?

by David Madison, Ph.D.,
Director, The National Guild of
Five O'Clock Club Career Coaches



David Madison

In 1993, a Five O'Clock Clubber was featured on the cover of *Modern Maturity* magazine. The title was "Job Hunting After 50." This seven-page article profiled a few of our job hunters, showed what the Club did for them, and highlighted their successes. And this was more than a decade ago when it was truly difficult for job searchers who were over 50.

Some years later, when *Business Week* was doing a story on the hopeless situation for those who were over 50, they called us for some case studies. We told them that what they were saying wasn't true and gave them plenty of older people to interview. The *new* story title was "Over Fifty? It's Not Hopeless." Everyone in this two-page article was a Five O'Clock Clubber, and we received only a small mention. But we were proud to have gotten the truth out there and made it easier for job hunters who may feel that there is no hope. And we were grateful to work with a journalist who was open to the real news—that people over 50 were finding great jobs.

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Negative news is easy. As they say in the media, "If it bleeds, it leads." The more negative the story, the more people are likely to read it. We sometimes half-jokingly tell our job hunters not to read the *New York Times*, for example, because the negative news about the job market will only depress them and take the wind out of their sails.

But my job, as Director of the Five O'Clock Club's National Guild of Career Coaches, is to help people find jobs by coordinating the efforts of our coaches across the country. Our coaches have mastered our proven methodology to help people get through the trauma of job search and end up with the right job. We work with a lot of successful job hunters who are in their fifties, sixties, and even a few in their seventies! Our methodology works.

So when I first glanced at the cover story of the May 16, 2005 *Fortune* magazine, "Fifty and Fired" (written by John Heylar), I said to myself, "Uh-oh. Looks like one more negative article." And, in fact, it was. The story begins with a full double-page photo of five somber-looking people who attend a Job Transition Ministry in Louisville. Accompanying the

photospread are these ominous words:

Getting fired during your peak earning years has always been scary. You'd scramble for a few months, but you'd find something. Today it's different. Get fired and you can scramble for years—and still find nothing. Welcome to the cold new world of the prematurely, involuntarily retired.

If you want to feel like a victim, keep on reading the article! Even the stark photos that accompany the article seem to have been selected to depress readers: The least depressing picture shows a man who "found his bliss in the pet crematorium business." It is regrettable that this article doesn't tell the story that over-50 job-hunters really need to hear. It is a one-sided piece.

Worst-Case Scenario: Out of Work for Two Years

To make the case that life in the job market is grim for people over 50, the editor includes figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but he drives home his point by profiling several job hunters whose stories *are* distressing.

His first example is Bob Miller of Chicago, who lost his job at Zurich Financial at age 53—and had been looking for two years when the article was written. Perhaps a half dozen other people are mentioned or quoted briefly as well—all about their frustrating experiences looking for work. Based on these examples, who wouldn't believe that being over 50 is a curse?

When you read these sad stories in the press, ask yourself, "Was this person conducting a good search or a bad one?"

Sad stories are easy to find. But the article never tells us: *Was Bob Miller's search a good one or a bad one?* The editor doesn't seem to have asked this question. It's very easy to be impressed if a job hunter claims to have sent out hundreds of résumés, made as many phone calls, and to have gone on dozens of interviews. That's a lot of activity, and, when someone has been pounding the pavement for months, we're inclined to give credit where credit is due. But what if the *quality* of all this activity is mediocre? Heylar doesn't seem to have considered the impact of this factor on his main premise. But how can anything be inferred about the downside of being 53 *if the guy is conducting a bad job search? The same thing could happen to a 23-year-old who is conducting a bad job search.* It's hard to tell for sure if Miller had a good or a bad search, but I

found some clues that make me wonder. We're told that Miller...

- "whiles away" the day making phone calls
- does a lot of reading
- mulls over "what the hell happened"
- "keeps up with fellow members of MENG" (Marketing Executives Networking Group)—most of whom are unemployed
- goes to support groups
- "sees a lot of people out there like himself, desperately trying to keep up appearances."

She wrote targeted letters to the CFOs of 50 companies. She didn't have to *look busy*; she *was busy*.

One of Miller's comments is especially revealing: "You go into upscale suburbs, and what you see is lot of guys with laptops and cellphones, *trying to look busy* at Starbucks" [my italics].

What can we learn about the *quality* of Miller's search from these few bits of information? By definition by the Five O'Clock Club, one component of a good job search—if you're unemployed—is spending 35 hours a week *on the search*. If you're really doing this, you don't have to try to *look busy*. One of our over-50 members launched a job search to find a position in another state. She wrote targeted letters to the CFOs of 50 companies, that is, each letter was based on thorough research and was tailored to each company and its needs. That took a lot of time. The last thing on her mind was *trying* to look busy.

On the other hand, Bob Miller's effort seems like busywork. The primary culprit was not his age, but a failure to conduct an intensive, organized and methodical search.

A good search also means getting meetings with people who are in a position to hire you. Networking with other

unemployed members of MENG probably will not be very effective; nor will spending time at support groups—although that can help keep up morale, unless sessions at the support group are used primarily for venting and commiserating. Miller also did a "lot of reading" and "whiled away the day making phone calls." This all sounds a bit too casual—like Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* who wanted to "while away the hours, conferring with the flowers." Were those phone calls part of his follow-up to targeted letters and an outreach to new networking contacts? Job hunters shouldn't kid themselves that spending a lot of time on the phone is "job search" if the calls aren't part of the marketing plan. And how focused was his extensive reading? Was he doing the painstaking research needed to expand his target list and learn more about potential employers?

Doing home improvements for four months is not a good way to get ready for an effective job search.

It's possible, of course, that part of Bob Miller's problem has been age discrimination—just as it's possible that he did a good job search for two years. But I don't think so. As we can see, there were enough clues in the article to make me suspect that the primary culprit was failure to conduct an intensive, organized, methodical search. Miller might be able to point to a lot of activity, *e.g.*, phone calls, résumés sent, networking meetings—and who knows how many hours logged in at Starbucks trying to look busy—but job hunters who come to the Five O'Clock Club soon learn that we have techniques for assessing the quality of the activity. Unless we understand *that*—was the activity mainly busywork or was it effective?—we shouldn't jump to conclusions about discrimination.

The other job hunter who gets the most attention in the article—and this is a mystery—is Tom McGoldrick, now

The Job-Search Buddy System

Do you wish you had someone to talk to—fairly often and informally—about the little things?



"Here's what I'm planning to do today in my search? What are *you* planning to do? Let's talk tomorrow to make sure we've done it." You and your job-search buddy could keep each other positive and on track, and encourage each other to do what you told the small group you were going to do: Make that call, send out those letters, write that follow-up proposal, focus on the most important things that should be done—rather than (for example) spending endless hours responding to job postings on the Web.

With your buddy, practice your Two-Minute Pitch, get ready for interviews, bounce ideas off each other. Some job-search buddies talk every day. Some talk a few times a week. Most of the conversation is by phone and e-mail.

Sometimes, people match themselves up as buddies. Just pick someone you get along with in your small group. Sometimes, your coach can match you up. However you do it, stay away from negative people who talk about how bad it is out there. They will drag you down.

The small group changes over time: people get jobs; new people come in. If you lose one buddy who got a job, get another buddy.

Your buddy does not have to be in your field or industry. In fact, being in the same field or industry could keep you focused on the industry rather than on the *process*. But you *do* have to get along! The relationship may last only a month or two, or go on for years. Some buddies become friends.

Of course, you should see your Five O'Clock Club career coach *privately* for résumé review, target development, salary negotiation, and job interview follow-up. It's usually best to get professional coaching advice for these areas. ●

IS IT AGE DISCRIMINATION OR A BAD SEARCH?

54, who lost his job as CIO at Clarke American Checks in 2002 after being there for seven years. "He spent the next four months in his house," we're told, "wallpapering and painting in a cold fury." When he decided to job hunt, an outplacement counselor suggested instead that he check out "small businesses for sale, and McGoldrick threw himself into that, reviewing 400 of them in three months." He ended up buying a pet cemetery—hence there's a happy ending to his story.

One of the biggest factors in job-search success is how effectively people search.

But how does this fit into an article about age discrimination? The outplacement counselor who advised him assumed that people over 50 have to "move on" from corporate jobs, but there is no way to make the case that McGoldrick's efforts were impaired by age discrimination. Indeed, if he researched 400 small businesses in just three months, it's a fairly good bet that he could have conducted a brilliant job search and landed well. Let me add one cautionary note, however: Doing home improvements for four months in a cold fury is not a good way to get ready for an effective job search. Nursing wounds for perhaps a couple of weeks can be justified, but one way to almost guarantee a longer, harder search is to pout or fume for a few months before moving on.

Perhaps the most unfortunate profile in the article is that of Linda Staley, age 52, who lost her IT job at a pharmaceutical company. Acting out the need for order in her life, one morning at five o'clock she made the bed when her husband got

up briefly: "She was all jagged nerves and pent-up energy...if she could just get her house in order, maybe her career would follow." There's a half-page photo of her sitting on the bed in a dark suit with the light behind her, looking defeated and forsaken. The making-the-bed incident, by the way, took place "toward the end of her 16 months between jobs." We're not told how or where Linda landed, so we really don't have a clue about how she went about job hunting. Apparently we're supposed to take it on faith that hers is another case of age discrimination. But I do wonder. Anyone who focuses 35 hours a week on the hard work of job search will not usually have a lot of "pent up energy." *So was this another case of a bad job search?*

Work hard at staying on the cutting edge, whatever that means in your field.

Watch Out for Those Statistics!

We do read in the article about some of the brutal truths about corpo-



rate life. For example, GE "made an obsession of identifying its hottest up-and-comers at tender ages...pity the middle-aged managers who occupied rungs along their route. They were called 'blockers,' and they had to be removed...[Jack] Welsh being an icon and GE being a management paragon, this system came to be imitated by other companies wishing to ooze youth and vitality." In our youth-oriented culture in general—even without a *Fortune 100* company being a role model—it can be argued that there is undoubtedly a bias in favor of youth and energy. Heylar cites a Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of displaced workers, covering 2001 to 2003: Workers age 55 through 64 were less likely (57 percent) to find new jobs than those 25 through 54 (69 percent).

Please note that 57 percent of people age 55 through 64 did get new jobs compared with 69 percent of those under age 55. The "cold new world of the prematurely, involuntarily retired" is an exaggeration, because it applies to the minority. This positioning of the 50-plus situation will cause more fear and panic than are justified.

Highway safety experts have long used the slogan *Don't Become a Statistic* to urge drivers to do what they can to stay alive on the road: Don't speed, drive defensively, wear seatbelts, don't drink and drive, etc. We can use a variation this theme



"Your resume states that you've worked with 2 presidents, won the Nobel Prize and climbed Mt. Everest. That's all fine and dandy, but how are you at telemarketing?"



to advise job-hunters over 50: *Don't Be Spooked by the Statistics!* Maybe it's true that 43 percent of people who get laid off between age 55 and 64 don't find jobs—and it's fair to ask if age discrimination is the primary reason—but 57 percent do. One of the biggest factors in job search success is how effectively people search; you don't have to become a statistic! Maybe the 43 percent who don't find jobs again aren't looking very hard or not at all—they are scared out of the job market by gloomy magazine articles!

If you're reading this article, chances are you already have some knowledge of the Five O'Clock Club job search methodology—hence, chances are, you would be able to be successful in the job market at any age.

Overcoming Age Discrimination

Of course, age discrimination is real—and the purpose of this article is not to deny that. However, we coach people over 50 to work harder and smarter at the job search. We do job hunters a service not by trying to scare the daylights out of them, but by making constructive suggestions for overcoming obstacles that may be age-related.

If you are over 50, what steps can you take to protect yourself as you try to keep your career on-course as you move through your 50s, 60s, and perhaps beyond? Here are some things to consider.

If you think your age may be working against you, don't allow your image to compound the problem.

Make Sure You're Keeping Up

The article cites a survey of 428 HR officers done by the Society for Human Resources Management: 53 percent said that older workers “didn't keep up with technology” and 28 percent felt that they were “less flexible.” It also quotes a MENG officer who speaks of “hundreds of thousands of obsolete professionals who can't find employment...” Obsolete? Behind on technology? Less flexible? None of these problems *necessarily* has anything to do with age! You may be 60—and, if you are career-minded, you should be able to show on an interview that none of these apply to you.

In other words, work hard at staying on the cutting edge, whatever that



"Don't mind me. I thought I'd use these boring office meetings to do my exercising."

What Human Resources Executives Say About Five O'Clock Club Outplacement!

"This thing works. I saw a structured, yet nurturing, environment where individuals searching for jobs positioned themselves for success. I saw 'accountability' in a non-intimidating environment. I was struck by the support and willingness to encourage those who had just started the process by the group members who had been there for a while."

— Employee Relations Officer, financial services organization

"Wow! I was immediately struck by the electric atmosphere and people's commitment to following the program. Job hunters reported on where they were in their searches and what they had accomplished the previous week.

The overall environment fosters sharing and mutual learning."
— Head of Human Resources, major law firm

"The Five O'Clock Club program is **far more effective than conventional outplacement.** Excellent materials, effective coaching and nanosecond responsiveness combine to get people focused on the central tasks of the job search. Selecting the Five O'Clock Outplacement Program was one of my best decisions this year."

—Sr. Vice President, Human Resources, manufacturing company

"You have made me look like a real genius in recommending The Five O'Clock Club [to our divisions around the country]!"

—SVP HR, major publishing firm

"Selecting Five O'Clock outplacement was one of my best decisions this year."

—SVP, HR, consumer products firm

might mean in your field. You will surely be condemning yourself to the scrap heap if, for example, you claim that you're not good with computers—and a few 50 year olds have shown up at the Five O'Clock Club with that attitude. Our response has been to *get with it*—and don't claim that the job market is beating up on you because of your age.

Hire a job-search coach and pay by the hour. It may be time to be guided by an expert.

Image Is Not Everything—But It Does Matter

Especially people who have not had to job-search for a long time might be unconcerned with how they look—and the impression that they make. If you're afraid that age may be working against you, don't allow your image to compound the problem. I'm not talking about getting plastic surgery or hair implants; I'm talking about looking sharp. Dress and grooming should be at 100 percent. This may mean shedding a few pounds, buying new clothes—and asking your friends: Do I look as sharp as I can be? Get honest feedback and take corrective measures if need be. Eliminate anything that can make people think—just from your grooming—that you're out of touch.

Age may not be the problem, but the discouragement factor is, and it's fueled by negative articles in the press.

I recently met a man in his fifties who had just landed a job, but only after a long stressful search. He obviously is a very skilled guy, but he hadn't bothered to reduce the odds against him because of his appearance. I wondered, "Why didn't anyone tell him about his ears? Why hadn't he noticed himself?" There was a lot of hair growing in his

ears—it was obvious and unsightly, so much so that it was a distraction. This only added to his general air of frumpiness. His age probably wasn't as much of a handicap as his sloppiness.

Get Professional Help

The *Fortune* article includes a short sidebar article of DOs and DON'Ts for those over fifty who have lost their jobs. But there's a major omission from the DO list. At the top of the list should be: *Hire a Job-Search Coach*. In other words, get advice from a professional who has helped hundreds of other people through this trauma. We know that job hunters can make very costly, painful mistakes, especially early on in the process (wallpapering in a fury for four months is a good example), and a career coach can help you avoid these. It may very well be more difficult to get a job when you're 55 instead of 35, "when I had no trouble getting offers." You're probably more senior now. It's time to be guided by an expert.

This may sound like self-serving advice coming from the director of an association of career coaches—but bear in mind that: (1) the Five O'Clock Club does not make money when we refer clients to our certified coaches—*i.e.*, we don't take a cut of the fee; and (2) our coaches are allowed to charge on a per hour basis only; no large up-front fees are permitted. We urge job hunters to avoid coaches who charge thousands of dollars up front for their services. But by all means find a coach who charges reasonable hourly rates and can help you to job search smartly.

Focus on Your Job Search—Not on a Law Suit

The article also discusses the problems of suing for age discrimination—and it's not been a pretty picture: "There are tens of thousands of age-discrimination suits filed every year...but people who file these complaints rarely win, or even get a cash settlement. In fact, simply avoiding a summary dismissal is an achievement." Prospects

may be better in the future in the wake of a recent Supreme Court ruling, but if your primary concern is your career, and getting back to work, a law-suit is a bad idea—for a least three reasons: the cost, the distraction, and the impact on your job search if word gets around that you're suing. Mysteriously, the last of the DOs listed in the *Fortune* sidebar article is to consider suing. This is probably not the right strategy for most readers.

Scramble is something that jet fighters do. Savvy job hunters don't scramble.

Final Thoughts on the *Fortune* Article

When the article appeared, the COO of the Five O'Clock Club, Richard Bayer—who is also an economist—wrote a letter to the *Fortune* editor, which was published; Richard wrote:

Finding a job when you're 55 or older is only slightly more difficult. According to the most recent survey (2002) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, those 55 to 64 who actively search for a job typically take only four weeks longer to find one than the population as a whole (a median of 13 weeks, vs. nine weeks). Further, the unemployment rate is lower for those 55 and older—3.5 percent, compared with 5.2 percent for the population at large (BLS, April 2005).

But the problem is the discouragement factor, which can be fueled by negative articles like yours. If older workers look for a job properly, they will find one almost as quickly as younger job seekers.

In fact we tell job hunters to avoid reading negative articles, because of the discouragement factor. Our main fear is that over-50 job hunters who can and should look for good jobs may feel that the odds against them are too great—and back off from the process.

Continued on back page

AGE DISCRIMINATION OR A BAD SEARCH?

Continued from page 7

It seems very likely that the *Fortune* article has given us examples of bad job searches, not age discrimination—and there could have been a softer, more positive tone. People who are out of work, no matter how old, can be fragile and vulnerable—and some of *Fortune's* witticisms are not very nice:

- “In 1991, long before Starbucks became the waiting lounge for the damned...”
- “...discarded executives of a certain age may never find a new position.”
- The BLS “offers a concise litany of the ways middle-aged people get screwed.”
- “...involuntary retirees looking to claw their way back into the game.”

And, finally, again, from the paragraph above the title on page 79 (my italics added):

- “Getting fired during your peak earning years has always been scary. You'd *scramble* for a few months, but you'd find something.

Today it's different. Get fired and you can *scramble* for years—and still find nothing.”

This choice of words may reflect a shallow understanding of job search as a scattered and panicked affair. Scramble is a technique for cooking eggs. Scramble is something that jet fighters do. Savvy job hunters don't scramble. At the Five O'Clock Club our members do their assessment, work out a marketing plan based on organized targets—and in the company of their coaches and peers, move through the process of getting interviews and turning them into offers. We have rarely found that people in their 50s and 60s “find nothing.” We have rarely found that age alone is an impediment.

Read “Landing Good Jobs After 50” in this issue to find out how an effective job search worked for these Five O'Clock Clubbers who are well over 50. And don't believe everything you read in the press. ●

Are you Conducting an Effective Job Search?

Having a good job search means:

- Starting with thorough assessment (The Seven Stories & Forty-Year Vision)—even if you know what you want to do.
- Spending 35 hours a week on the search if you're unemployed (15 hours if you have a job).
- Developing a detailed personal marketing plan—as well as a résumé and cover letters.
- Searching by organized targets—all mapped out on your marketing plan.
- Aiming for 200 *positions*—not job openings—and always pushing toward this goal.
- Using all four ways of getting interviews, with special focus on direct contact as well as networking.
- Measuring the quality of all of your efforts. Always be aware whether you're in Stage 1, 2 or 3.
- Working hard at having 6 to 10 things in the works at all time.
- Getting expert guidance from a career coach and from a weekly strategy group.
- Following up after interviews with much more than thank-you notes.

For more details on all of these, study the four-page centerfold in this issue—an overview of the Five O'Clock Club methodology.



THE FIVE O'CLOCK NEWS

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“We greatly appreciate the always high quality work that The Five O'Clock does for our former employees.”

Head of HR, major not-for-profit

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