

# The Old Gray Mares

## THEY'RE BETTER THAN THEY USED TO BE

**F**ifty 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! ●

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