

BTW – DON'T MENTION THE AGE!

By Beverley Neil, CRW, CERW

It's true! Anonymous statistics and whispered conversations behind closed doors confirm it. Just don't get caught saying or implying it out loud. In Australia, once you have passed 40 your opportunities for employment or advancement within senior management are dramatically reduced.

Despite the fact that the under 40s are more likely to stay with a company for only two to three years, they, rather than the 40-plus candidates, are the ones who are seen as the future. Drake (Australia) has been warning of the coming 40-plus crisis since 2000 after conducting an intensive nationwide survey targeting more than 500 senior executives and HR managers. Now the Australian Bureau of Statistics are confirming it and the Queensland government has even gone so far as to address the unmentionable by putting in place a mature workers' wage subsidy to entice companies to review their unspoken position.

In Drake's report, headed "Age Discrimination Is Alive and Well", they indicate the results were much worse than anticipated, and use words such as "shocking", "tragic" and "alarming". Findings include:

- None of the 500 surveyed would choose to employ as managers or executives anyone in their 50s.
- Sixty five percent said employees over 50 would be the first they would retrench.
- Sixty two percent choose their executives from the 31-40 age group.
- Only 23 per cent prefer those in the 41-50 age bracket.

Executive director for Australian organisation Council on the Ageing, Mark Tucker-Evans, believes a contributing factor in the problem is that the human resources management arena is dominated by the under 40s who view things differently from the previous generation, and who have a different agenda in their own career, and when looking to employ or advance personnel.

"They (younger workers) see new jobs require new skills, so they get the new skills," Tucker-Evans says. "That's what older workers have to accept if they want to stay in work. They have to accept that they are competing with the easily adaptable young worker." He stipulates that life-long learning has to replace early-life education and to "tailor résumés to suit each position."

So how do we, as résumé writers, assist our clients in the over 40s age group?

For the over 45s the average term of unemployment is 85 weeks. By the time many clients finally come to accept they need help and turn to a professional, he or she may be feeling lost and disconsolate.

Many are frustrated with their lack of job search success, lack a clear direction and simply want to find 'a job'. It is important that they understand the crucial importance of identifying and pursuing a definite career path. Perhaps they already know the direction they wish to pursue but are finding it impossible to move into, or stay within, that arena. It is possible that they may need to broaden their horizons or look to the past to develop a viable professional future.

In each of these scenarios the client may need to consult a career advisor first. If it is not a service we offer ourselves then, as part of our professional network, we should align ourselves with other professionals in the career development field so that we may recommend a trusted advisor.

Impress upon your clients the advantages of targeting specific companies, researching via publications, the Internet, or colleagues to identify areas of mutual benefit and ways in which they can assist the organisation to overcome problems or achieve outcomes. They also need to understand that, as résumé writers, our results are much more powerful when we are writing for a specific industry or actual position.

Bring to your clients attention the benefits of networking: not directly asking for work but just staying in touch with past colleagues and clients: meeting up for lunch, remembering birthdays or events, ensuring in subtle ways they are not forgotten. Many clients who were schooled in always referring to

and relying on the local newspaper are unaware that an estimated 75%-80% of positions are filled through word of mouth.

Encourage your client to develop a self-directed learning schedule relevant to their industry or career path. It is no longer enough to have a university degree too old to date, and tucked away in the recesses of an educational history hidden at the end of the résumé. On-going training is no longer an option, it is a necessity and requires enthusiasm, progressive thinking and a high degree of professionalism and dedication. Challenging the impression that older people have less energy and mental capacity, self-directed learning indicates an advanced stage of learning development, especially when complimented by the expertise, judgment and perspective which age and experience brings.

And when your client receives an interview - first impressions *do* count. In the first 30 seconds of the interview your client will be assessed and categorised. Unfair or not, it is a fact. It only makes sense to ensure that every second counts. Does their style of dress date them? Could they look at a new hairstyle? While these issues do not even remotely affect their ability to blitz the job, they may not be given the opportunity if they don't pass the 'first impression test'.

Presenting the over 40s résumé in the best light

Due to the sheer volume of résumés received, a basic fact of life is the need of the recruiter to rapidly eliminate as many résumés as possible.

Tim Dermady, president of ExecutiveFit Recruiting and Search, says, "The preferred format is a chronological résumé. My personal recommendation is to go back no further than 18 years in an individual's work history, otherwise you run the chance of 'dating' that job seeker out of the market."

A possible option is a dateless chronological résumé focusing on achievements rather than length of career. Recruiters can still add up, so if your client has had several jobs over the course of 20 plus years it may still be the best option to leave out the earlier positions and just include any major accomplishments from those positions in the profile section.

If a functional format seems to be the best option, always attach the relevant company name to all quantifiable experiences to avoid confusion and

save cross checking – an activity that the recruiter may prefer not to do and instead, once again, assign your client's résumé to 'the bin'.

Technology skills are another vitally important area to identify in assisting your 40-plus job seeker. Establish and highlight exactly which technical expertise he or she possesses. If, however, the only technical skill is in, say, MS Word it is best left out altogether as basic word processing skills are a given in today's market.

And of course it goes without saying – dig and delve to bring out those stunning achievements which will ensure your client will hear the magical words, "And when can you come in for an interview?" But – don't mention the age. Sssshhhh!

Beverley Neil has dual international résumé accreditation, is a multiple award winning résumé writer and author of the online course *Launching Your Résumé Writing Career*. She can be contacted via www.onlineresumewriterscourse.com