

# Networking at 50 Plus

*By Dan Woog, Monster Contributing Writer*

You're working on your job search. You've done your due diligence and understand the importance of networking, but if you're over 50, the traditional networking rules of going to professional meetings and handing out business cards won't be enough.

Experience is a good teacher. Here are some lessons older job seekers may not realize they've learned!

## **Know Your Sweet Spot**

First, you must be clear about what type of job or company you're networking for, says Keith Ferrazzi, author of **“Never Eat Alone and Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time”**.

Younger applicants are generally broader in scope. However, "the more ambiguous you are, the tougher it is," says Ferrazzi. "Older folks should have a clear understanding of their sweet spot: Where they'd be good and why. When you're over 50, you've got credibility. Give clarity to the experience that's behind your focus."

"Ask anyone who cares about you," Ferrazzi adds. "You never know who'll play golf tomorrow with the person you talk to today. You don't know who your dentist knows or who your brother-in-law knows at work." These people have "a higher level of confidence recommending someone over 50 than someone who's stretching for a job," he says. Besides, they have more contacts than younger people.

## **Be Your Age, Just Don't Act It**

Older people tend to be more reserved when asking about potential contacts or jobs. "Get over it," Ferrazzi says. "Act like a young person."

But, notes Daniel J. Kadlec, author of **“The Power Years: A User's Guide to the Rest of Your Life”**, "never appear desperate. You want people to recognize your accomplishments and professionalism before they recognize you're job hunting. Of course, you're not; you're simply open to new opportunities."

## **Find a Mentor - Be a Mentor**

Ferrazzi encourages more than reaching out to younger people. Ask them to mentor you. Jack Welch, former chairman and CEO of General Electric, had a 25-year-old mentor and assigned 20 something mentors to his top executives. "Don't be embarrassed to ask how the world works today," says Ferrazzi. In return, you can mentor your mentors by offering your own experience.

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### **This Is Not Your Mother's or Father's Networking**

One way the world works, of course, is online. "This is not your mom and pop networking anymore," says Jean Cummings, a personal branding strategist and resume consultant who works with many 50-plus executives.

"Today, the Internet is key, even for job seekers who did not grow up with it."

- Business Web sites like LinkedIn and social sites like Eons are "good ways to connect with people in your target companies and in your field."
- So is the Business Network International, which bills itself as "...the world's largest referral organization" and includes regional chapters and vast databases.
- The AARP has business and social community boards
- The Human Capital Institute recently sponsored an excellent Webinar (online seminar containing audio and video) aimed at older job seekers.

### **Make Time for Face Time**

After identifying contacts, arrange face-to-face meetings, Cummings says. If the organization where you seek to work is accessible, such as a local business or small company, simply walking in is an effective way to get a brief interview, she adds. "You'll immediately separate yourself out from those who only send paper and electronic resumes."

When reaching out to contacts, "Articulate your personal brand," Cummings says.

- Put the emphasis on what you uniquely bring to a job in terms of experience, wisdom, savvy and knowledge.
- Offer a sense of the challenges and opportunities their organization may be facing.
- Offer your thoughts on how you can improve their ability to make money, save money, limit risk, innovate and solve problems."

Don't apply only for posted jobs, Cummings says. "Since you're able to talk the language of your business or industry and you're up on the latest trends, ask your contacts about jobs still in proposal or development stages. You could help create your own new job."

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Cummings also suggests networking through trade associations you already belong to. Call people with whom you've worked on past projects. Many association Web sites have active discussion and bulletin boards.

Kadlec offers these additional hints:

- Raise your profile by authoring an op-ed in your local newspaper, or maybe even a regular column.
- Give speeches to local clubs.
- Join some boards
- Help out with a charity

These are all good ways to impress people who may be in a position to hire or recommend you."

**(End)**