

Life beyond retirement

Mature workers can still contribute to the workforce with their wealth of knowledge and experience

A rapidly aging workforce and declining birthrates means more economies are facing a labour crisis where there are more people retiring out of the workforce than there are younger workers entering it. The Census of Population 2010 revealed 37 per cent of Singapore's population is aged 45 and above - this is almost 10 per cent more than a decade ago.

In recent times, encouraged by government campaigns to encourage employers to engage older workers, organisations now realise that the silver workforce represent a rich source of very skilled, experienced and flexible employees. But even with an inevitable labour shortage here and everywhere else in the world, many older workers nevertheless find it difficult to land a job because of pervading discrimination and negative stereotypes.

Managing expectations

Older workers are encouraged to work beyond their retirement age, but it is important for them to be realistic with their expectations.

In Singapore, a new labour law which will take effect from 1 January 2012 will make it compulsory for companies to offer re-employment to their older employees once they reach the age of 62. Older workers can then continue to work until they are 65 - this will eventually be raised to 67. Some employers have already re-engineered jobs for their older staff and offered them flexible working arrangements, but not all re-employment opportunities will be in the same job or at the same pay.

A study by the Employer Alliance in Singapore revealed that older workers desire flexible working hours as that would allow them to spend more time with their families and engage in recreation activities. They also wanted a lighter workload. However, the study also found that only 5% to 15% of new positions here are made available to older people as older employees are perceived to have lower energy levels, lack relevant skills and the ability to adapt quickly.

Enhancing employability

Nevertheless, there are several measures older workers can consider to increase their prospects in the existing job market.

One of the biggest misconceptions employers have of older workers is that their skills are outdated and they are not willing to learn new skills. Therefore, mature workers need to show how they are still current in today's workforce, particularly highlighting their computer and technical skills, willingness to learn and keeping their skills updated.

Here are a few quick tips:

Revise that resume. Extensive experience and deep industrial knowledge should always be highlighted in your resume, but exclude older jobs that have little or no relevance.

Emphasise your computer or technical skills, or any other self-upgrading courses you have attended to keep yourself applicable to the current job market.

Cast your search far and wide. On any job hunt, professional and personal networks remain a significant resource in job hunting. Tap onto the contacts of an ex-employer or family member to find out more about positions which are suitable to your skills and expertise.

Be enthusiastic about new technology. Not only should your keenness in new technology be conveyed in your resume, it should also be put across in your interview. You should also show that you are willing and eager to learn new things.

Dress smartly. Regardless of age or level, it is important to look professional - even if the position you are applying for is a part-time one. Interviewers assess candidates on the whole package, and not just your resume and interview skills.