

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD.... 5 THINGS EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR

By Daisy M. Saunders

When looking for work, older workers are often competing with people who are years younger. You may even find yourself being interviewed by someone young enough to be your child or grandchild. Don't be afraid or intimidated by this, simply focus on what you have to offer and how you can add value to the organization. Present a clear picture of someone who is confident and ready to work.

You give yourself an added advantage when you stand out from the crowd. To get that added advantage, it pays to have some knowledge and understanding of what employers look for – not just in mature workers – but in workers, period.

When employers are looking for someone to hire and promote, they want a person who is highly motivated, uses common sense, pays attention to detail, can anticipate and solve problems, and is a team player. Five desirable employee characteristics are:

Professional Image: First impressions count! People will make 10 or more decisions about you based strictly on the way you look. You have, no doubt, heard the phrase, "You can't judge a book by its cover". Though this may be true, the fact remains that each and every day, books and magazines are purchased based entirely on what's on the cover. Think of the magazines displayed at the check-out counter at your local grocery store. In some instances, if the cover (the headline) isn't racy or enticing enough, the book/magazine remains on the shelf. Though it may not seem fair, think of yourself as a book. Your cover represents your professional image. And, if that image is not appealing, you will not be given a chance to show what you can do. If you don't want to stay on the shelf, you must pay close attention to what you wear, how you speak, what you say, the expression on your face, and the manner in which you interact with others. As an older adult looking for a job, you are never off duty. You never know when you might be in the presence of a potential employer. And, after you get the job, you're still not off duty – i.e., if you want to keep it and be seen as upwardly mobile or promotable.

Good Work Habits. If you truly want to stand out from the crowd and have a meaningful work experience, understand this: your habits determine your future. Employers want employees with good work habits. They want people who show up for work on-time and ready to work. They want people who are dependable and leave their personal business at home. And, they want people who are there to work – not socialize, talk on the phone or take excessive breaks.

Positive Attitude. You can see an attitude. It's expressed before you say a word. It shows in the way you look, stand, walk or talk. Your attitude sets the stage for everything that will happen to you in your life. Charles Swindol wrote: "Attitude is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than what people do or say. It's more important than appearance, giftedness or skill." To many, attitude is more important than what is on your

resume. I have been given many opportunities because of my “*I can do that*” attitude. So, when you show up, project an attitude that says, “I have what you are looking for, I am here to work, and “I can and will add value”. Attitude trumps many things.

Resourceful and Shows Initiative. Employers like people who don’t wait to be told what to do every single minute of the day. They want people who know how and when to take action without being prodded. When there is down time, they want employees who look for ways to make things better; employees who can anticipate and solve problems.

Learner-Friendly. No matter how old you are or how much experience you have, employers want employees who show an openness to learn and grow. They want employees who are not afraid to try out new concepts and ideas. An enthusiastic, knowledge-hungry job seeker who is eager to learn and meet new challenges stands out – regardless of age.

These are just a few of the critical qualities and characteristics you need to succeed in today’s competitive work environment. Identify the degree to which you possess these qualities. Then, market them in your resume, your cover letter and your interview. Let your words and your actions clearly demonstrate that you stand out from the crowd.

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