

too old for a job?

... not if you qualify, says this woman executive who has advice for both employers and mature applicants



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The author, right, with assistant Evelyn Thornton—who started as wrapper at the mill after her four children were in school; learned new skills, advanced rapidly.

THE fortyish, motherly looking woman spoke timidly as she accepted the seat near my desk. "I need a job, but I suppose I'm too old," she said.

Her need and her uncertainty were typical of many applicants who come to the personnel office of our pulp and paper mill, where more than 2,500 men and women are employed.

But they do not need to be apologetic or timid!

Our country wants these women in the labor market. Half the 28 million women who now work dur-

ing some portion of the year are over 40 years of age. Imagine the chaos which would occur if they were lifted out of their jobs!

Not only do we need the women in the work force that we have, but we need *more* of them. Business, industry, professions, education and government are competing for more people with higher skills. *Mature women form the one big labor pool left in the United States.*

Business and professional women as individuals and as clubs can render a tremendous service by helping those who want jobs to meet

the needs of employers who are seeking workers; and by convincing employers that mature women are good employment risks.

Those of us in management should emphasize these advantages of employing older women:

1. Statistics tell us that the average girl is marrying at the age of 20 and having her children early. Therefore, employers should realize that *the older woman gives more promise of uninterrupted employment* than the 18-year-old who will probably leave for an early marriage.

2. Because of these uninterrupted

work years, employers have reason to believe that *the mature woman offers a good investment in training.* In plant operations, such as go on in our pulp and paper industry where no previous training is expected, on-the-job training is a large factor in time, effort and expense. Employers are building for the future when they spend money on people who will remain in the work force.

3. The mature woman is likely to bring qualities of understanding and patience to a job—invaluable assets to the company.

This Older Woman Made Good

A woman like Anna Self is an excellent illustration of our philosophy:

When she came to us for a stenographic job 12 years ago, she had been away from office work for 25 years. She was 47 years old, a motherly-looking woman with graying hair and a serene face. The last of her five children was finishing high school.

We hired Mrs. Self and assigned her to the maintenance superintendent.

Now, twelve years later, this poised and efficient woman is not only doing a superb job as a stenographer but is also relieving her boss of the bulk of worrisome office detail.

Her good judgment and understanding provide an atmosphere of cheerful competence in this busy office which supervises the work of some 400 maintenance men.

First Consideration— Suitability

I should like to stress that *the basic policy of any employer should be to hire the most suitable applicant.* We do not discriminate against younger workers and hire many girls as young as 18 when they are qualified for the work.

Our supervisors agree with our policy. Of course there are always some joking remarks such as: "Why do you send all the pretty young girls to the other departments?" But in their serious moments, our men colleagues have a different attitude.

They echo the sentiments of the factory superintendent, who was told that a 44-year-old woman was being assigned to his department.

"I don't care how old she is," he commented, "or how much she weighs if she can do the work. *To me the most glamorous girls are the ones who do the most work with the least complaining.*"

Older Woman Must Train for Work

An important consideration, not for a moment to be overlooked, is the responsibility of an older woman—or any woman—to prepare herself for a job.

All too often, a woman will enter my office timidly, aggressively or belligerently with nothing to offer but her availability. Usually, in these cases, she supposes rather vaguely that she can file.

It is absolutely necessary for women to realize that they must trade some skill for a paycheck and prepare themselves accordingly.

Fortunately, there are splendid adult educational opportunities available. Vocational schools, business colleges and junior colleges offer convenient and practical means of preparation for a job.

An untrained woman will almost certainly have difficulty finding work promptly. After a year or two of training, however, she may find employers bidding for her services.

Appearance Important

Another responsibility of the mature woman job-seeker is to make an attractive appearance. If she is applying for a plant job, she should look like a plant worker. Her hair should be neat and set close to her head; her clothing should be modeled along tailored lines. She should be brisk and alert.

If applying for an office job, she

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WOMAN TALK

*The air between us sizzled, seethed
With confidences softly breathed.
How nice it was! How sweet
To have our secret thoughts to share!
(Now, if we give it lots of care,
We need no longer meet).*

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should approach the interview looking like a business woman. An interviewer is inclined to believe that a neat, trim figure and clean, tailored clothes are indicative of neat, precise workmanship.

Well-groomed, alert applicants win half the hiring battle in the first five minutes by the impact of their reassuring appearance.

Cheerfulness Essential

A third invaluable attribute of an older woman seeking work is a warm-hearted, cheerful personality. What a treasure an uncomplaining woman is to an employer!

Of course, if she sees needed improvements, she should not keep silent in hopeless martyrdom. On the other hand, the matter should be adjusted through the proper channels with common sense and logic.

But employed women need to remind themselves that a complaining, nagging female is just as exasperating in an office or factory as she is at home; and such qualities, when displayed, do a great disservice to the employment of women in general.

One most unfortunate tendency of many women who have attained places of responsibility in industry is the overlay of crispness or carping criticism or sophistication which conceals all natural sympathy and intuitive understanding.

These women may be performing their jobs creditably, but they make themselves so unpopular that management heaves a collective sigh of relief when circumstances separate them from the job. Furthermore, they are very likely to be replaced by men.

Women should realize one of their greatest assets should be their ability to relieve tensions—not create them.

The simplest and most practical guide to success, in the long run, is the Golden Rule. Every employer looks for friendliness, appreciation and loyalty.

The older woman can make her most unique contribution to the work situation by exercising these qualities.

(See "40-Plus Problem" page 13)

A CLUB OF OUR OWN

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I'd lived there less than a year and was gone all day working in Baltimore. Fortunately, my mother is active in club work in the area and could suggest women who might be interested in BPW. So I got on the telephone.

You may be surprised at the response I heard over and over from people I contacted. "Is this another social club?" they'd ask. "If so, no thank you!" (Annapolis is highly over-organized socially, I found out.)

But I'd always answer: "This is not a social club. This club is for serious-minded business women who want to know what's going on around them; who want to improve themselves. . . ." Then they'd say: "Good, let's hear more!"

Anyway, I'd promised Margaret Bowers, our state president, that we'd have a new club for her; and we weren't going to let anything stop us.

In June Margaret and Mary Speicher met with several of us to discuss forming a club, to outline

our plan of action, and to appoint temporary officers. For the rest of the summer we worked at contacting every business and professional woman in the area.

Things went a little slowly at first because many people were out of town on vacations or entertaining summer guests. Summer isn't the best time in the world to try to start a club. You'll get farther, faster in the fall or winter. For instance, we called one dinner meeting when 20 accepted—and only eight showed up! Sure, I was disappointed. We all were. But we went right back to work telephoning, recontacting and keeping the name of BPW alive through newspaper publicity.

In September, when everyone was back on schedule after the summer season, the Baltimore Club, our sponsor, gave a reception to which we invited all our prospective members. State officers and Baltimore Club members explained about the BPW Federation, what a fine organization it is, and how it functions.

That reception was just what we needed. Shortly afterward we had 20 enthusiastic "sure" members. So

we could go ahead and adopt by-laws, elect permanent officers and start making preparations for our Charter Banquet.

If all this sounds smooth and easy, don't be misled! We had troubles aplenty—frantic telephone calls, frenzied searching for answers to questions. But our sponsoring club and our state officers and chairmen always came to the rescue.

On October 1, we of the Annapolis Club received our charter—with Marguerite Rawalt, immediate past president of the National Federation, there to install officers. It was a thrilling night for all 20 of us. We felt so proud and happy. At last, we were united as one group of working women, dedicated to the purposes and objectives of the Federation.

If you are a BPW member in an area where no club exists, let me urge you strongly to do all you can to help form a club. You'll be doing a wonderful service for the working women of your community—and your accomplishment will give you great personal satisfaction. Take it from one who knows!

40-Plus Problem

The B & PW Informer, published by the Lubbock, Texas' Club, reprints the following provocative article attributed to the Accountant's Weekly Report, What's Happening in Washington

AGE discrimination is destined to become an issue of great importance (in the second session of the eighty-fifth congress).

Legislative aides of Maryland's Senator John Marshall Butler (R) are already at work gathering data to support amendments to all appropriation bills denying government contracts to firms whose employment policies militate against the above-40 age groups.

Legislators of both political parties, increasingly conscious of the political potential of older people, are expected to adopt such amendments overwhelmingly. . . .

The above-40 problem is getting more serious with each passing month. Men and women, in many instances only 35 years old, are finding increasing employment resistance.

A survey conducted last spring by the Department of Labor disclosed amazing facts:

In Philadelphia, 79% of employers barred persons in their middle forties.

In Detroit, 66% of older workers were told not to apply.

In Miami, 73% of job orders set age limitations.

In Minneapolis and St. Paul the percentage was about 66.

Many reasons are advanced for denying jobs to older citizens: They slow down, have more accidents, can't get along with younger workers, are out ill more often, etc. But the major excuse is higher insurance and pension costs.

An independent committee designated by the Labor Department for an extensive study agreed there would be a slight increase in insurance and pension costs—but only about one cent an hour for a man of 55 as compared with a man of 30.

In light of the new congressional interest in the plight of the middle-aged, it would perhaps be smart for business concerns with employment age limitations—especially those doing business with the government—to reexamine and justify their employment practices.