

Navigating the Job Market For the Over-50 Professional

Hot Topic Draws a Crowd

Nearly 40 people – twice the number expected – jammed into the Essex room of the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Nashua Thursday night (11/8/07) to get tips on how to navigate the job market for the over-50 crowd.

The first in a series of events planned by the newly-formed New Hampshire chapter of DECedOut (soon to be called DEC Connection) was dubbed a huge success. The DEC Connection is an organization for anyone and everyone who ever was connected to Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC).

For those of you who attended “Navigating the Job Market for the Over-50 Professional,” or who registered but were unable to attend, as well as for those who couldn’t make it, please read on.

And watch this web site for future events from the New Hampshire chapter!

Many thanks to Bob Farquhar for preparing this compelling and easy-to-digest transcript of the evening's panel discussion/audience Q&A.

Questions / Answers from 11/8/07 Event, “Navigating the Job Market for the Over-50 Professional”

To make this *the event that keeps giving*, we offer a synopsis of the questions and answers. The questions were those asked most often by attendees as they registered for the event. The answers, for the most part, came from a panel of discussion leaders who are among the top New England people in their fields, as well as from the audience itself.

How this information is organized: 1) For Starters... Barbara Langdon, the moderator, gets the ball rolling with some basic questions of the panel. 2) Discussion 3) Final Thoughts from our experts 4) Langdon summarizes the key points.

Discussion Leaders

Moderator: Barbara Langdon, Founder & President, Market Momentum, LLC

- Mino Sullivan, President, Career Success Coaching
- Reo Hamel, Founder and Managing Principal, Reo Hamel Associates
- Stephanie Daniel, Vice President, Keystone Partners
- Kevin Pellerin, Senior Business Development Manager, Modis

For Starters...

Q. (Langdon): How do you view the current employment market?

A. (Pellerin): It's a good market. Companies are hiring for the right reasons. Revenues are strong. Growth is steady. It's a good time to be looking. If you're a senior candidate, remember: In a rising tide, all boats rise. Companies are looking for any type of worker they can add to the team. Older workers bring experience.

Q. (Langdon): There are people here in all phases of their careers. Some just want advice on how to have a meaningful life after work.

A. (Sullivan): Barbara (Langdon) is my marketing communications person so I must put in a plug for her. My specialty is working with people who say, "Get me out of what I'm doing; I can't stand my job. What can I do next?" I figure out what's going to float their boat. Maybe someone seeking a full-time job; or a retiree who wants to work part-time. Key to that is figuring out what you want to do. So Step No. 1 is to figure out who are you? What is important to you? What are your values? What motivates and excites you? What are your skills? Put all this together and you find out what you want to do. A comprehensive job search is next; then the job.

Q. (Langdon): What options / opportunities are out there for the older worker?

A. (Hamel): I'm an older worker and there are a lot of options available. The key term here is solutions. With all of our customers, whether they are full-time, part-time or consultants, it's about solutions. People will purchase your services if you offer solutions to their problems. Your talent, your accomplishments... all that is fine, but it comes down to solutions. I was shocked by the list of questions sent to me; very basic. You should know better.

Q. (Moderator): What is the impact of the internet and social networking? LinkedIn, for example... how should we use it in a job search? What should our expectations be?

A. (Daniel): First, some background on LinkedIn: It's an online, professional networking community. You enter your profile and connect with people... people you know but haven't seen for a while, people you want to meet... You can share resources and leads with one another. Beyond connecting to people in your sphere of interest, you can connect with "Jimmy," who then has access to my contacts and my contacts' contacts. You would have to introduce me to your contacts. The Power of Networking has not changed in the last 25 years. Of those seeking jobs, between 75% and 80% find them through networking. www.linkedin.com is just one example.

Discussion...

Q. (Audience Member): Two recruiters won't list me because their clients feel that given my age (68) I wouldn't be there long enough for the clients to recover their investment (the fee paid to recruiters). What do you recommend?

Hamel: I recommend you not use recruiters. (Laughter).

You're right. Professional recruiters are not going to represent someone who is 68. Clients figure you won't be there more than a year or two. Concentrate on solutions; market yourself that way. Go Google "Director of Marketing for Company X." It's amazing the names you can come up with. Then contact that person and tell him / her, "Here's what I can do." Having a specific name to contact is far better than sending your resume to HR. I just had a consultant finish a year long assignment with me. He's 68. I present candidates in the best possible light and help them with their resumes. It doesn't matter if they're 28 or 68; I don't agree there is a cutoff age. You have the confidence it takes; you'll find what you're looking for.

Audience Member: It's illegal to ask your age.

Audience Member: Illegal or not, it happens.

Sullivan: Identify contract recruiters and talk to them! A few recruiters might take you. You have to go after the unpublished market through networking. Or writing letters to organizations where you want to work. Write companies that are hiring. Talk about a problem they're having and how you can help solve that problem. Target your letters – write 50 to 100 of them. Get in and start talking to people.

Q. (Audience Member): Everywhere I go I'm finding that "domain experience" – narrow niches vs. general experience – is required. People like me who were at DEC for 25 or 30 years have a breadth of experience in many industries but not that much depth in any one. What are we to do?

Similar Q. (Audience Member): How does a software generalist get a job tailored for a software specialist?

Pellerin: Try working with someone like Mino (Sullivan), who can help you tailor your job description.

Daniel: When you hear the domain story, what are some ways to deal with it? Is there a short-term course or certification you can pursue?

Audience Member: I don't think so. We just don't have the history.

Daniel: Examine whether there are other reasons behind this. Sometimes a prospective employer finds something else in your background and gives you the domain line. Go to (www.Monster.com) or a similar site. People submit wish lists a mile long. They (hiring managers) are getting feedback from somewhere; find out where. Get the straight scoop from the people who connect you into the company.

Langdon: So it comes down to getting the inside scoop, identifying the company's needs and targeting your effort to those problems.

Sullivan: No candidate is perfect; everyone has a short suit. Go on line and check out every article you can find on how to handle objections and make them into positives. People care about one thing: "Can you solve our problem?" (Solutions).

Pellerin: You need examples of how you overcame something you didn't know while in another role. Role play these. Some recruiters work directly with a hiring manager

and know exactly what the manager is looking for and what you're looking for. I liken it to dating. It takes a lot of dates before you find that match.

Sullivan: Great perseverance. That's the answer.

Hamel (directed to the 68-year-old who asked about recruiter bias): Watching you with your laptop... you obviously know how to handle it. If I get a letter that says you're good with a laptop, you're sending me a message. If I get an email and that statement is in the lead sentence, it would capture my attention.

Q. (Audience): Large companies can be selective in job postings. But what about the smaller companies that have spawned out of technology? They aren't household names but they need people with broad experience. It's high risk (for you) because they may run out of money. Maybe they have a product but no strategy, no marketing plan, no feet on the street... How can you find that kind of company?

Audience Member: Read "Mass High Tech." I read it every week. (<http://masshightech.bizjournals.com/masshightech>)

Pellerin: The Boston Globe (<http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe>) publishes their top 100. Hoovers (<http://www.hoovers.com>) has good info. The Herald (<http://www.bostonherald.com>) has similar information. Once a month the Globe publishes companies getting funded. Great source of information. Reo (Hamel) mentioned Google. You can look at people who are leaders in different companies that got sold and see what they're doing now. Chances are they need someone with large-company experience.

Daniel: The Boston Business Journal (<http://www.bizjournals.com/boston>) is one of the best resources. Creating a list of target companies and industries you're going after is a great idea. Your elevator pitch promotes you, and you need focus for that. I second the motion on Hoovers; it's a great resource, too.

Audience Member: New England Tech Wire (<http://www.newenglandtechwire.com>) sends out daily blasts.

Audience Member: New Hampshire (High) Technology Council (<http://www.nhhtc.org>) is a resource, too.

Audience Member: Software Association of NH (<http://www.swanh.org>) offers forums, summits and conferences unique to New Hampshire.

Langdon: So, we should focus our efforts on companies that sell certain products into certain industries, research those companies and then package ourselves as the solutions to these issues.

Hamel: My wife's a librarian. Research libraries love to help you do research. Do yourself a favor and go to the library.

Sullivan: My daughter's a technical recruiter. Put your resumes right here in one place for her. (Laughter). Google "technical recruiter, Nashua." They get paid by the company, not by you. They may all have 25 reqs in the works.

Pellerin: It's great to work with multiple recruiters but the companies pay our fees. We're not looking for part of your income. It costs these companies money. You want to talk to as many people as you can but make sure you're open and honest. If I submit you to a company you've already been introduced to, that's bad; doesn't help anyone. You definitely won't get an interview if you've been submitted twice.

Q. (Audience): Is your advice site-specific?

Pellerin: Most companies are centralized for hiring. If I have a relationship with the manager and you went in thru HR, my relationship with the manager can help.

Hamel: I highly recommend to my clients that they not apply for any position until they've had contact with the hiring manager. To see a position and fill out a form and send it in is a waste of time. You must have a contact; then you can write: "Dear Mr. Jones... At the suggestion of Kevin Black, I'm writing you..."

Audience Member: I've been hired after sending my resume to a Web site. Twice.

Pellerin: Rare; very rare.

Sullivan: An English professor needed a job. We found six openings. He emailed people he knew with an academic background and asked if they knew anyone at these six institutions. He got great responses. Some of his friends hand-delivered resumes. Very impressive.

Daniel: There's such a thing as employee referrals, too. Works. Some companies offer a bonus for their employees if they find good candidates.

Q. (Audience): What are the skills that will be most valued, or the solutions people will seek, in 2, 5, 10 or 15 years?

Daniel: I can't predict those kinds of trends. But when you present a solution to an employer, you'll fall into a category, i.e., you bring in the bacon (sales) or you streamline processes (operations) or you retain key customers (CRM)... We call these the wooing factors. Decide on the potential value you bring to the table. Define your value-add, the solutions you can provide. Develop your value proposition.

Q. (Audience): I am semi-retired and want to stay that way. But I'd like to find contract or project positions. I'm a marketing professional. Recruiters are focused on IT or full-time employment. When I hear outsourcing I think contracting. How do you find outsourcing for marketing people?

Daniel: Your professional associations... American Marketing Association, for example (<http://www.marketingpower.com>). Mino (Sullivan) mentioned earlier a list of web sites that cater to the mature worker. Most aren't specific to marketing – more retail, hospitality, maybe technical. You're going to get the most information from the networking contacts face-to-face. *Personal interaction.*

Sullivan: You can use your search engine: Type "Contract recruiters."

Langdon: Sologig.com (<http://www.sologig.com>) is a credible website.

Q. (Audience): What's the process you use as a recruiter?

Pellerin: Our recruiters will talk with you by phone, do face to face if possible, see where you fit, get your compensation range, use some online testing tools...

Audience Member: BrainBench (<http://www.brainbench.com>) is a good tool to test you on certain skills. Sometimes we'll include a write-up, too.

Q. (Audience): What about screening? And do you check references right away?

Pellerin: After you meet people you can get a sense of what they're all about and – a snapshot of the person and what they've done. We do formal background check, as well, if needed. Mostly we check references when the company gets serious about hiring the person. How do we determine the latter? We have six categories, and we ask the company to rank the person.

Sullivan: I would encourage you to Google yourselves. I've had situations where hiring managers have brought up things that weren't positive. You need to know if there's something negative about you out there.

Q. (Audience): Do you know New Hampshire recruiters who are focusing on the non-profit space?

Sullivan: Not in New Hampshire.

Daniel: Do you have non-profit experience? If you don't have it, a recruiter is not the best way to get into that business.

Audience Member: I'd like to transition from commercial to non-profit.

Daniel: Look at the Civic Ventures web site (<http://www.civicventures.org>). And read the book. It's entitled "Encore." Web site is (<http://www.encore.org>). Mark Freedman's book talks about the "encore career pioneers, who are working not only for continued income, but for the promise of more meaning" in their lives.

Q. (Audience): I'm a small business owner in the Bedford (NH) area. I like retirees – experienced people. But we can't pay the salaries that high-tech individuals are accustomed to receiving. Do you have a solution?

Audience Member: Believe them when they tell you they don't necessarily need a lot of money.

Audience Member: If you have a technical background and want to teach in New Hampshire you can get certified without going through the cert process. It's on the state website (<http://www.nh.gov>). There's a need in high schools in New Hampshire, especially in technical fields such as engineering and math.

Audience Member: Google for "overqualified."

Audience Member: A lot of companies told me they couldn't pay me what I was used to getting. I just did telemarketing for 6 months for a lot less money. In 2001, I was making \$15 an hour more than I'm making now.

Q. (Langdon): Is it a given for older workers that we need to be flexible on money, or should we stick to our guns and go for the gold?

Pellerin: The market defines it, but you may decide to accept less under the right conditions. Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling is an example. He wanted to work here so for the 2008 season he agreed to less money (\$7M) with incentives that could pay him what he thinks he's worth (\$14M).

Audience Member / Telemarketer: We have people from ages 25 to 76. We'll hire someone for 6 to 12 months as a transition job.

Q. (Audience): What advice do you have for resumes?

Pellerin: The resume is a tool to get the interview. Period. It's not a history of all our jobs. It's not a truth serum. Think of it as a marketing tool.

Sullivan: People hire people and skill sets. Start with the verb but never "responsible for." Hit them with bulleted results, results, results.

Q. (Audience): How many pages should a resume be, and how far back should we go?

Pellerin: Not more than two pages. I get some that are 6-8 pages long. A manager looks at your resume for about 15 seconds. He / she is not going to look at four pages. Two is plenty. Most important stuff should be front and center.

Q. Functional vs. chronological?

Daniel and Pellerin: Chronological gives you all the information you need in one place. Functional is OK every now and then.

Hamel: Most recruiters who see a functional resume say what is this person trying to hide?

Langdon: So with functional resumes exercise extreme caution.

Final Thoughts from Our Experts...

Q. (Moderator): What thought would each of you leave with the audience?

Pellerin: I know there's age discrimination, but it's all in your attitude, how you think about yourself. If you think "I'm an old person and I'm not going to get this job," you won't. Keep your image positive.

Sullivan: You can make any transition you want. The gentleman who is interested in non-profit, for example. Move transferable skills under different titles. I'll give you a complementary hour over the phone if you're looking to transition from your job.

Hamel: I want to reinforce what Kevin (Pellerin) and Mino (Sullivan) said. And, for those of you interested in non-profit world, there's a lot of information out there. www.civicventures.org was mentioned earlier.

Daniel: You have a rich networking group right here – your corporate alumni group. This is your first public function. Next time you get together, everyone of you should spend time saying to each other what you're looking for.

Langdon's Summary of Key Points...

- Older workers bring experience.
- The key: Figure out what you want to do.
- Think Solutions.
- Networking still works.
- Get the inside scoop, identify the company's needs, and target your efforts to solve those needs.
- Perseverance pays.
- Focus on companies selling certain products into certain industries, and offer solutions.
- How can you find small companies that need you? Use the Web.
- Your private research awaits you at the public library.
- What's your added value? Don't forget the wooing factors.
- Gentlemen (and ladies), start your (search) engines.
- Don't forget to Google yourself.
- The resume is a tool to get an interview; it's not truth serum.
- Be careful with those functional resumes.
- Keep your image positive.
- Speaking of networking, try The DEC Connection.