

THE TOP 15 PRACTICES FOR BECOMING A WORK-READY ELDER.

By Dr Mike Rungie

There's plenty published these days about why employers aren't better prepared for older workers but there's almost nothing about why older workers aren't better prepared for employers. We've talked to lots of older workers and distilled out a list of the top 15 practices we found.

1. Invest in a commitment to life-long learning. Have you fallen for the retirement myth that you don't have to keep learning? You've learnt hard to get where you are... it is your choice whether your skills now become nostalgic or current.
2. Join an older-worker affinity group. What do you reckon a few people in your situation might say to you that you've never said to yourself? What happens when the group realises that you all have the same challenges and might need the same strategies?
3. Get a younger mentor. We all need a mentor when we are growing, and the best mentor is always someone who can see your skills and wants you in their world.
4. Learn to mentor, then become a mentor. You've got lots to give, but lots to learn about how to mentor as an older person. People don't want your war stories, they want your learnings applied to their situation.
5. Know and manage the four big risks of retirement. You've managed risks all your life. Then just when the risks get unrelenting, you stop doing it. In this very ageist world, the risks at retirement will get you if you don't mitigate them.
6. Learn and practice transition skills. You are in the biggest transition of your life. Do you know how to recognise the doldrum stage, the cocoon stage and the getting-ready stage of this transition, and grow your way through them without getting stuck somewhere in the middle.
7. Read the books about older people and work. There's plenty written about not working, much less about working... which tells you heaps about the world you are about to enter, and it won't take you long.
8. Discover the different ways real older people are working. Stories are always the best. Find a few older people who have worked out where the jobs are, you might be very surprised... and very relieved. While ageist attitudes are keeping you out of the workplace, the future of work will be very kind to you.
9. Merge your skills into the areas where workers are most needed. And remember you are bound to be better at what computers can't do than the digital natives.
10. Keep your tech skills current. You don't have to be a digital native, but you can't be a dinosaur
11. Start your own enterprise. If no-one will offer you a job, or at least a job you want... then invent your own. You might be amazed how many are doing this and discovering that older people often make great entrepreneurs.

12. Have an elevator pitch. Not being able to explain what you do or want to do, is the best way to inhibit your learning and opportunities. Test it out on your friends first.
13. Invest in your wardrobe, good health and wellbeing. Everyone else does, so don't fall for the old... "you should take me as I am, I'm not playing your game".
14. Resist the retirement chatter. The never ending...I've never been so busy having so much fun... blocks out that big niggle that there's got to be more to life. You don't have to live the afternoon of your life like you live the morning... and that morning mind-set that's worked so well for you needs to go.
15. Become part of a national conversation for change in older persons work. If you're having trouble finding all this out, so is everybody else. Let's join up our individual experiences into a national conversation that becomes a national truth about the purpose of longevity.

You don't have to do all of these... but you do have to do some. We've been surprised to find how many older job seekers aren't doing any. Lists like this aren't common currency, because the ageist world doesn't really want you to work. So forward it to your friends... and to those looking for other purposeful roles... it works just as well.