



Serenidad
C o n s u l t i n g

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FACING PEOPLE OVER 40

At what age does ‘experienced and mature’ become ‘too old’ in the eyes of a potential employer? Most will say 40; I believe it is much closer to 30, and as each decade passes the challenges for men and women become greater and more diverse. Likewise, the opportunity to create a positive outcome from ‘change’ strengthens.

My entrée into senior management was in 1974, age 16. Young in years, mature in approach and experience by virtue of having started paid work at age 12. By 19 I was a senior leader in the 5-star hospitality industry in Australia, leading teams of diverse professionals and yet when I sat down for my first career discussion with the GM, my boss, his response to “where can I go in the company now?” was ‘you’ll never be promoted beyond this level because you’re a woman’. He loved my work but I was, in his eyes, the wrong gender to ever make it to a higher and more accountable level. Shocked and stunned at such blatant prejudice and discrimination, and knowing how the industry was controlled by men, within weeks and a lot of false starts, I walked forward to a new life - starting over again at the bottom of the ladder. Little did I know then that I would have to do this twice more before the age of 55.

Over the decades I have come to appreciate that there are some key attitudes and behaviors to adopt, strategies to employ, and expectations to manage when you are faced with the challenge of re-inventing and/or re-launching yourself when circumstances dictate. The root causes for why you are where you are, are not really that important as what has transpired cannot be undone. It’s what you do with the lessons learned and how you grow, strengthen and change that is critical to your future. For women and men alike:

Attitudes and Behaviors:

- *Don’t give up. If you give up, it will never happen. Own the outcome and stay the course, as far as humanly possible;*
- *Don’t adopt a victim mindset. You are only a victim of circumstance for a nano-second. What you do and don’t do from that moment on is all a matter of personal choice;*
- *Let go of baggage from the past as quickly and permanently as you can – believe me, holding onto baggage will show on your face;*
- *View your health as your most important asset - maintain it at the most optimum level possible - eat well and sleep soundly;*
- *Stay positive in your thinking, despite any disappointments. A positive attitude will lift your and others’ spirits and help sustain you when crossing hurdles and hitting speed bumps;*
- *Believe in yourself and your ability to succeed;*
- *Adopt the positive attitude that “change is an opportunity, never a threat” (No Boxing Allowed).*

Strategies:

- *Decide what you really want first and foremost;*
- *Write down a strategic plan that you know is achievable (with some more hard work) – I give an example of this in No Boxing Allowed;*

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- *Speak up and outward; connect with everyone you think might be able to identify and/or open a door of opportunity, no matter how remote the connection might seem from what you're seeking to achieve. You never know what small window will help open a large door;*
- *Focus on promoting your strengths and improving on your deficiencies. As no human being is perfect we all have deficiencies to overcome and work through; some may be more noticeable than others and some you may choose to ignore. Paraphrased from my first book **No Boxing Allowed**, 'as you choose and as you decide, so your life will be formed';*
- *Utilize your networks and connections to identify and filter future career opportunities and prioritize these incoming opportunities based on your strategic plan;*
- *Change or improve your appearance and outward profile – new hair style, clothing to suit the new 'you', add a briefcase or compendium, improve your overall health and fitness, and so on;*
- *Manage your time so that you do not become drained or lose sight of your strategic goals.*

Expectations:

- *Make sure your expectations of yourself are realistic. Don't expect too much of yourself. Many women have a tendency to see themselves as the be-all and end-all, the safety net that holds everything together. Ask yourself – are you super woman? When you answer "no", then you're half way there. Likewise for men, it is NOT your unwritten obligation to be the sole provider and protector. You are not superman and women will respect you more for openly sharing your limitations, than hiding behind a mask of perfection.*
- *Don't allow others' expectations to rule your every waking minute or sway you from satisfying your fundamental needs;*
- *Keep the dialogue open and honest with all affected stakeholders so that you can manage their expectations as best as possible;*
- *Know that you will need time to manage the changes – time to create the new career path, cement the new beginning, send/receive communiques, adapt to your new paradigm, and transition your family and loved ones who are in this with you.*

No matter what the circumstance you are facing, make your choices and moves with an overlay of discernment. What I mean by that is - be selective, focus on a quality outcome, work hard not to settle for less than you know you deserve. When you have time and money on your side, utilize that luxury to bring a deeper, more equitable and sustainable result. If you're pushed for time, make the choices that feel right in your soul – what makes you feel good. If you compromise your standards too much, the longer it will take to recover your position in life and strengthen your life foundations.

The Author – Nola Hennessy:

Nola is Founder and CEO/Managing Director of this global consultancy and a multi award-winning author of non-fiction works that inspire and teach others to be the best they can be. Nola is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and has been a senior leader, respected consultant and highly successful change agent, in both Government and the private sector in Australia and internationally, since 1976. Oct 25, 2012

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