

Staying Flexible

Almost any list of job-seeking tips for seniors includes a section on “keeping your skills current and remaining flexible.” With rapid increases in technology, today’s workplace requires workers who are willing to learn and change with the job. To stay employable, older workers must be continually updating their skill set. Finally, in a tough labor market, flexibility and trainability are increasingly important.

Some Tips

Take advantage of available training opportunities.

If you are already employed, make sure to get that competitive edge by taking any training your employer offers. Be the first to learn the updated software package. Don’t hang on to the old technologies.

Examine and determine your own skill-set needs.

Before you can update your skill set, you need to know what skills are in demand. Find out the cutting edge skills for your occupation and learn them.

Be sure to boost your software skills. Jobs ranging from clerical work to retail sales now require some expertise with computers—particularly a working knowledge of the Microsoft Windows environment. Search out the “in-demand” software skills. You may find related tutorials offered by area community colleges, your local library, embedded in the software or on the Web. “If people don’t have these skills, they’re shooting themselves in the foot,” says career counselor Linsey Levine of CareerCounsel.

Conquer your fear. Don’t be afraid to take a class at the local community college or through continuing education programs. More and more older students are upgrading their



Today’s workplace
requires workers
who are willing to
learn and change
with the job.

More Facts

- In many important respects, people nearing 65 today are at least as financially prepared for retirement as the same age group was 10 or 20 years ago. Incomes, education, and net worth are all up for the current age group heading towards retirement.
- Pension coverage for women has increased over the past decade. The percentage of women without a pension decreased from 48 percent in 1994 to 37 percent in 2004. The percentage of men without pensions has remained steady at about 25 percent.
- Women receive lower retirement benefits than men.
- About 80 percent of those 65 years and older have at least one chronic health condition and 50 percent have at least two.

skills. Chances are you won't be the only "older" student in the class.

Know at least the computer basics:

- Basic skills to operate a computer, such as handling a computer mouse, typing on a keyboard, and navigating file systems and menus.
- Microsoft Office programs, with particular attention to Word, Excel and PowerPoint—roughly in that order.
- Essential Internet skills, such as e-mail, web browsing and searching.

Enlist others in getting started.

Find a reverse mentor—a younger person who can guide you in updating your skills. When it comes to computers and software, your children, grandchildren or friends can be a great resource. If you aren't sure how up-to-date your skills are, you might want to visit a temporary employment agency and take their tests.

Search out resources for training.

There are an amazing number of resources for upgrading your skills—particularly your computer skills.

Often training is free or close to it. Libraries, senior centers, learning centers, adult or continuing education programs, community colleges and online tutorials can all help you upgrade your skills.

A library is often the best starting point, as libraries typically have computers available for patrons' use and may even offer brief computer classes (or know of the best local options).

Once you take training, be sure to practice. Any skill not put to use will deteriorate and evaporate if it isn't used. Plus, the best way to learn a software package is to actually use it in several projects. You'll forget what you've learned if you don't use it!

Be sure to market your new skills. New skills will aid you only if

you let people know you have them. You might want to think about two things: experience and work samples. Volunteer work can help increase your skill levels. When you update your skills as technology advances, it shows that you are someone who loves learning. It will give employers the impression that you are resilient and adaptable.

Make sure your resume and the way you send it reflect your skills. If you can't e-mail your resume, it signals that you may not be wired to the Internet or comfortable using e-mail. It also indicates you don't understand that recruiters need resumes that are in data form so they can search the text.

Many employers only accept electronic resumes. You can obtain a free e-mail account from your Internet service provider or other web sites such as hotmail (www.hotmail.com) and google (www.google.com; click on "Mail"). ☞