

# WORK-WISE: AGE NO BAR IN THE JOB MARKET

Older people are finding out that they have to push a little harder to get jobs in the corporate world. But they are proving a point or two in the bargain

BY NIKHIL MENON

**U**ma Appaiah, 52, retired from ING Vysya as assistant manager in 2002 after 25 years of service. Post-retirement, she was counting on getting some rest and spending quality time with her family. But the rising cost of living forced her to hunt for a job again. This time, however, she found that her services were not in great demand. "I was offered very low packages," Appaiah laments. She finally opted to join Tupperware—a company that specialises in food storage products—as a consultant (dealer) with no fixed salary, but with her earnings dependent on the sales volume she is able to achieve.

There are many elderly individuals who are skilled, capable, experienced, and out of a job. Given the occasional exception, corporate India doesn't always treat its older workers too kindly.

This is borne out by the findings of placement and staffing company Manpower India's 'Older Worker' survey. Of the 4,742 Indian employers covered by the survey, only about 14 per cent had strategies in place to recruit workers over 50 years of age. Given the high labour demand in sectors like engineering, IT and sales, this is surprising indeed.

Agrees Soumen Basu, executive chairman, Manpower India Services, "At a time when we face an ageing population and skill shortages, many organisations are putting obstacles in the way of hiring older people." While the outlook is still optimistic for retirees or those approaching retirement, those who want to switch jobs after a certain age or re-enter the ranks of India's white-collar workforce after retirement find the going tough.

Global staffing provider Kelly Services' Kelly 'Global Workforce Index' survey

reveals another facet of this trend. Out of the 2,000 Indian respondents approached, 35 per cent of the workers aged 45 or above felt they had been discriminated against because of their age. This figure was higher than the number of people who had experienced gender-related discrimination. Older individuals are also given a miss by headhunting agencies, unless they are recruiting for senior-level positions.

When people are younger, they tend to switch jobs at the drop of a hat. But older people do not have that luxury. So if you feel trapped in your job or are retired and bored stiff of sitting at home doing absolutely nothing, what are your options?

**Out in the cold.** Chartered accountancy (CA) firms, BPOs, banking and even technology-based sectors such as IT, telecom and e-learning are now hiring older people for their experience, skill, maturity and loyalty. However, there is reluctance to take on board older workers due to doubts about their ability to deliver and fear of having to make too many concessions for them. For instance, insurance companies are willing to employ older people as agents. But, they are less willing to make com-

mitments to them as employees. Also, employers wonder, would they be able to get along with their younger co-workers?

M. Subramaniam, 'Second Career' manager at Dignity Foundation, an organisation that caters to the needs of the elderly, says, "We write to several employers to try and place older citizens in various jobs, but most of them are very rigid." He estimates that only seven to eight people have been placed by Dignity in Mumbai in the last two years. "But we are still keen on doing what we do. Elderly people are extremely hard-working, committed and loyal to their jobs and they have no reservations in working with younger colleagues or learning new software," Subramaniam says.

**Giving age a chance.** Despite this disturbing trend, certain organisations are still willing to take a leap of faith and invest in elderly workers. S.N. Jadhav, chief people officer, GTL, says, "The return on investment on individuals aged 50-plus is higher than on younger employees, as we don't need to train senior workers too much. Plus, they are good at leading and mentoring their younger colleagues."

A living proof of his statements



HELP DESK

Contact details of persons/associations/foundations that may help you get the job you're looking for:

**>>HYDERABAD AND CHENNAI**  
K.R. Gangadharan  
krganga@hotmail.com

**>>MUMBAI**  
M. Subramaniam  
Dignity Foundation's Second Careers cell  
Tel: 022-23885253, 9869442252  
To contact Dignity's other centres,  
mail: dignity@vsnl.com

**>>SECUNDERABAD**  
P. Vyasamoorthy  
Society for Serving Seniors (online group)  
http://societyforservingseniors.satyamcsr.org

**>>DELHI**  
Mathew Cherian  
HelpAge India  
Tel: 9810042046  
mathew.cherian@helpageindia.org



## K.V. SESHADRI 64

Trustee and executive secretary, GTL

He took up a relatively low-key job in GTL after 30 years in the Air Force and grew rapidly in the organisation

"I still haven't thought about when I'll retire. The day I wake up and don't feel like going to work, I'll quit. But I'm not done yet, not by a long shot."

is K.V. Seshadri, an ex-IAF officer, who handles GTL's corporate social responsibility activities at the age of 64, as trustee and executive secretary, GTL Foundation. He admits that it was necessary for him to adjust to a relatively low-key job after 30 years in the Air Force during which he got a Shaurya Chakra, a peace-time gallantry award. Seshadri joined GTL in 1995 as a budget specialist and grew rapidly in the organisation. He never asked for concessions or flexible work timings as life in the military had imbued him with the ability to work long and hard without complaining. Knowledge-based fields such as educa-

tion, Knowledge Process Outsourcing, (KPO) and e-learning are areas that senior individuals can get into. L.S. Venkatesh, general manager of e-learning company Edutech, says, "I don't think age is a barrier in this field. Subject matter expertise and instructional pedagogy are the key."

HelpAge India conducts occasional workshops in metros for people approaching retirement and helps place them. Says chief executive Mathew Cherian, "We look at the insurance sector and NGOs."

CA firms hire older and retired executives from the banking sector as consultants. J.S. Mani, 65, joined CA firm Yardi Prabhu

## OLD IS GOLD

Employers open to hiring older professionals:

>>Wipro Technologies: Need-based  
www.careers.wipro.com/default.asp

>>Tata Consultancy Services: Project-based  
www.recruitment.tcs.com/

>>GTL: Banking, finance, accounts, treasury, application development  
http://www.gtlimited.com/Working@GTL.ap

>>Max New York Life Insurance: Sales agents  
www.maxnewyorlife.com/Home/Careers.aspx

>>Edutech: Subject matter/instructional pedagogy experts  
www.edutech.com/india/careers/opportunities.htm

>>Havell's India: Operations, marketing, project management  
www.havells.com/careers.htm

>>Yardi Prabhu & Associates: Banking and accounting experts  
www.yardiprabhu.com/default.htm

>>BPOs such as Citigroup Global Services hire older professionals and retirees in customer sales processes  
For Citigroup Global Services:  
www.citigroupglobalservices.com/careers/ApplyOnline.html

and Associates about three years ago. With a long stint in banking behind him, he enjoys his current job. "If you keep yourself updated in your field, finding a career at this age shouldn't be too tough," he feels.

**Salary cut.** If you are planning to go back to work, you might have to compromise as far as remuneration is concerned. Of course, the extent to which it will be adjusted will depend on your skills, the nature of work, and the company. GTL, for example, prides itself on being fair with its older workers as far as money is concerned—it compensates them at market rate.

Kuldeep Razdan, 51, joined Wipro as general manager (resourcing) last year after quitting his Chennai-based job at Sutherland Global Services, a customer management company in the BPO space. He wanted to come back to his native city, Bangalore, and was lucky to land a job there. "I did take a pay cut (around 12 per cent), but I was ready to make that sacrifice," he says.

What you need to remember is that young or old, you will have to prove your worth at the workplace. For that, there is no better way than to be on the ball. ||