

Repackage
Yourself
to Get the
Job You
Want

CAREER COMEBACK



Lisa Johnson Mandell

Book Career Comeback

Repackage Yourself to Get the Job You Want

Lisa Johnson Mandell
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Recommendation

Lisa Johnson Mandell, an entertainment journalist, has been there: an underemployed, 40-something woman looking for work in a tough industry, Hollywood's media market. Armed with that experience and a journalist's sensibility for snappy writing, she offers a surprisingly useful, if not fully original, book on resurrecting or reinventing your career. By defining "an older woman" in the workplace as beyond 40, Mandell may be focusing on too young an audience for her aging-in-the-workforce advice, but her book is engaging and easy to read. Its handy lists cover everything from updating your wardrobe to learning about today's youth culture to interviewing like a pro. Suggestions for rolling back the years on your résumé rank at the top of the usefulness list. Mandell offers sensible pointers for establishing your brand and promoting yourself online. Her suggestions to sample youth culture, with an ultracaffeinated Red Bull drink or a round of the Halo video game, probably won't send you directly to the CEO's chair, but they might be fun. (Plus, that shot of caffeine might help you update your résumé in 15 minutes flat. Just proofread it later.) *BooksInShort* thinks older women who want to return to the workforce will get a valuable shot of energy from this book. Especially when combined with a Red Bull.

Take-Aways

- Looking for work in a tough economy isn't easy, especially when you're a woman older than 40. But some relatively painless changes and updates can transform your results.
- Determine your unique skills, and decide if you need to change fields.
- You'll compete against youngsters for jobs. Realize their assets – flexibility, tech skills – but acknowledge yours, too, such as loyalty and the ability to communicate.
- Experience today's youth culture to feel more connected to it. Try TiVo, join Facebook, play "Halo" and hang out with someone younger than 30.
- Modernize your wardrobe and get rid of outmoded clothes and shoes.
- Establish a professional brand that showcases your individual abilities.
- Promote that brand with your business cards, résumé and blog. Polish your "elevator pitch".
- Network online to promote yourself and help potential employers find you.
- Craft a résumé that depicts a competent, hard-working woman of an unknown age. Take out dates and citations that might age you.
- Look well put-together and research the company ahead of time to improve your chances.

Summary

Taking Stock

Start your journey to a better job by asking why you don't have the career you want. Be honest. This is the time for soul-searching about where you've been and where you want to be, careerwise and personally. Then realize what you do have: abundant experience, a valuable commodity that comes only with time. Consider it your primary asset as you prepare to upgrade yourself, your résumé, your wardrobe and even your interview skills in pursuit of better work.

"You have all sorts of talents, skills and experience working for you – or against you, as the case may be."

If your soul-searching turns up a need to abandon your current path, consider growth industries with more opportunities, such as insurance, health care and “green” business. As you evaluate yourself, focus on the skills that separate you from everyone else, not on how your age holds you back. Don’t waste time after you leave a job, no matter the reason. Start looking immediately, because that’s when you’re most attractive to new employers. Consider getting temporary work through an employment agency that is active in your industry so you can keep your skills fresh, make connections and learn about unposted jobs.

“A career comeback is *not* about trying to fight against age biases...or forcing decision-makers to change. It all boils down to putting your freshest...and dynamic self out there.”

Think about the “five-piece career puzzle” as you contemplate where you want this journey to take you. The pieces are: your interests or passions, your skills and abilities, your lifestyle, your finances, and your values. Consider how you’d like these elements to work together in your career. Identify people you know who like their jobs and who work for big employers. Connect with these employees and see if any of their companies have an opening for you.

Casing the Competition

As an older woman looking for work in a challenging economy, you need to know who else is in the workforce. You will have to communicate with younger colleagues, answer to them and collaborate with them. Each generation brings different values, styles and skills to work, from the loyalty of the Silent Generation (born before 1946) to the tech-savvy, multitasking Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1995). Gen Y employees will fill much of the labor gap as Baby Boomers start to retire.

“Take a good long look at your life, evaluate where you are and how you got there, reassess your strengths and your values, and figure out how to combine them to move forward.”

Despite negative stereotypes about Gen Y’s poor work ethic and inappropriate clothes, its members bring many good things to the workplace. They live for technology, and learn and work at lightning speed. They’d probably love to teach you the newest cellphone “apps.” They value their personal lives, so they won’t jump at overtime pay or a high-salaried drudge job. They’re environmentally aware. They embrace management or technology change easily. And multitasking is natural to them, which may be how they work so fast.

“Take the wheel and start driving your own life rather than letting someone from your past drive for you.”

Don’t write yourself off if you’re older than 40. Human resources professionals say that you bring many strengths to the workplace. Managers value – and will pay for – your ability to work alone without needing much direction, feedback or help. You communicate well and know how to connect personally with the public. You compete and want to be the best because that’s what’s expected. You’re loyal to your job and your employer, especially as retirement approaches.

Getting Hip

Keeping up with today’s technology and pop culture matters. It might help your job search and will certainly make you more current. Try some of these suggestions for “instant hip” to improve your ability to communicate with and understand younger people:

- Learn to use TiVo or a similar digital video recording device.
- Sample Red Bull, the caffeinated drink that keeps many young people up all night.
- Check out the Twilight series of teen vampire romances by Stephanie Meyer.
- Play a current video game, such as “Guitar Hero” or “Halo.”
- Shop for jeans at the coolest store in town.
- Check out a culture or news blog such as Gawker or HuffingtonPost daily.
- Register for an online newsletter and download a top-selling song from iTunes.
- Use your cellphone to send a text message or take a picture and forward it.
- Join Facebook and start connecting with friends.
- Try out a fitness boot camp class.
- Drive a hybrid car.
- Type your name into Google and see what you find.
- Watch the top 10 most popular videos on YouTube.
- Find your favorite TV show online and watch an episode.
- Take a nap to recharge your energy, burn calories and keep up with Gen Y.
- Hang out with a 20-something.

“Accept what you can’t change and adapt to what you can. Flexibility is a wonderful thing.”

Exercise is an easy, cheap way to feel younger and more energetic. If you find it hard to think and act positively while you’re out of work, start with “an attitude of gratitude.” Focus on the good in your life and on what you do have.

Making Yourself Over

Start in your closet. Discard or give away worn-out clothes and shoes. Style expert Charla Krupp recommends immediately tossing several items, including jackets with big shoulder pads, nude pantyhose, holiday sweaters, and handbags imprinted with photos of kids or dogs. Krupp also suggests picking up a black pencil skirt, black opaque tights, an up-to-date bag, a hip watch, great-fitting dark jeans and a handful of other staples to give you the look of a chic professional. Consider the style expectations of your intended work environment when adding to your wardrobe, whether it’s “business casual, creative chic or executive/corporate.” Take some revitalizing tips from top Hollywood experts: Add fatty acids and vitamins to your diet. Exfoliate your skin. Whiten your teeth. Keep your hands and hair looking healthy.

Establishing Your Brand

To help potential employers know who you are and what you stand for, brand yourself; in other words, showcase what makes you special, different and outstanding. Find your niche and work it. Write an “elevator pitch” to polish your brand and your job search. This quick, succinct spiel that you can give anytime must include your name, profession, what you do and how you’re unique. Design business cards to supplement your pitch and your brand. Your new card must show your name, title or business, business address (unless you work at home, then just give a town), email address and cellphone number. Use distinctive, professional-looking cards. Consider a volunteer position to help you develop your brand. Finally, photograph your brand. Have high-quality pictures taken of you in your newly updated wardrobe. Use them on your business cards, your website and your online profile. Great pictures can be a powerful confidence builder.

Weaving the Web

Establishing your presence online means starting your own blog, a simple process that doesn’t need to be expensive or complicated. Start by visiting websites that offer templates or enable you to post your blog. This is a great vehicle for showing off your Internet skills to employers, showcasing work experience that might not fit on a résumé, practicing writing skills and staying up-to-date. Create professional content that distinguishes your brand. Write items that establish your expertise. Searching for things to blog about will keep you fresh and open to new ideas.

“Having a profile on premier online social networks...makes it possible for your next fabulous employer to track you down.”

Blog content must be interesting and original. Careless spelling, grammar mistakes or dull content will reflect badly on you. Keep blog entries short and to the point. Perhaps begin with a question. Offer handy advice. Tell stories. Use a chatty style and write in the first person singular. Tease readers to get them to return. Make lists. Showcase your opinions, but limit the sarcasm and criticism. Refer to current events. Post lots of photos, including your own. Consider adding video.

“Maintain a positive, confident demeanor, even if the interviewer is saying outrageous things that really push your buttons.”

Social networking is a crucial tool for finding a great job. Connecting via the Internet is vital for hiring, and goes far beyond socializing and posting party pictures. Facebook, MySpace, Plaxo, LinkedIn and Twitter provide job hunters with special platforms largely because employers search these sites for potential hires. Get involved in any and all the networks related to your field. At least establish yourself on LinkedIn and Facebook. On LinkedIn, that means joining, completing your profile, connecting with your network, and writing and requesting recommendations. For Facebook, which is more social, sign up, search for friends and start posting – on your page and others’ pages. But while you conquer the online world, don’t forget old-fashioned networking. Connecting face-to-face with people in your field remains important, so attend industry events and pay attention to your business liaisons.

Rejuvenating Your Résumé

Shaving years off your résumé might be the quickest path to a new job. Instead of boasting “25 years of experience,” which makes you sound old, craft a résumé that depicts a competent, hard-working woman of an unknown age. “Botoxing” your résumé isn’t fun or easy, but it pays. Start by removing date-revealing details, particularly work experience more than 15 years old. Don’t list your graduation date, the dates of each previous job, old computer skills, outdated industry lingo, negative details, and, of course, anything untrue or exaggerated. Omit such phrases as “references available upon request,” don’t use small type and don’t exceed two pages.

“In an interview, or in an entire career, actual age is irrelevant...vibrancy, confidence and enthusiasm...make the biggest difference.”

Add your contact details, a professional-sounding email address, a bulleted career summary and your job history. Note specific accomplishments and describe your duties. List industry-related skills, particularly technical expertise; your education, including relevant seminars and workshops; and any interests, hobbies or other details that make you look like a better employee or highlight your energy and attitude. Use strategic key words culled from job descriptions. Proofread your résumé several times and ask someone else to proof it again. Typos and grammatical errors could cost you a job.

Acing the Interview

Start an interview with confidence and enthusiasm. Dress appropriately so you look strong, capable and stylish. Go for simple jewelry, hairstyle and makeup; tailored, well-fitting clothes; clean, comfortable shoes; a nice bag; and no stockings. Avoid perfume, gum, jeans, hats and miniskirts. Bring a good pen, copies of your résumé, work samples and a printed list of references. Draft good answers to predictable interview questions. Heed these 12 tips:

1. Learn as much as possible about the company and your interviewer beforehand.
2. Look great.
3. Think about putting the other person at ease (to distract you from your own nerves).
4. Keep the handshake simple.
5. Wait for directions about where and when to sit.
6. Sit up straight.
7. Bring a list of great questions to ask.
8. Do not interrupt.
9. Speak directly and in complete sentences.
10. Don’t worry about the occasional pause in conversation.
11. Don’t bring up personal information.
12. Leave only when you’re dismissed, and say thank you.

“I wish someone would have informed me when I first started my own career comeback that as we age, we have some distinct advantages.”

Avoid these interview pitfalls: disparaging former employers, asking personal questions, acting desperate, fidgeting, flirting, avoiding your weaknesses, talking about your anxiety and acting defensive. If you encounter questions about your age and experience, focus on your skills, strengths, and interest in learning and growing. Don't act entitled because of your years of experience. Follow up with a short thank-you email.

About the Author

Lisa Johnson Mandell, an entertainment reporter and film critic, also wrote *Become Your Own Matchmaker* and the tongue-in-cheek *How to Snare a Millionaire*. Since her career comeback, she has been featured on major network and cable news programs and has become a lead career blogger for AOL. She now hosts *This Week in Books*.
