

The head of a company that places people older than 50 says that computer skills and a good attitude are key.

By Henry J. Holcomb  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

It is getting easier for people age 50 and older to find meaningful jobs, according to one placement agency that focuses on them.

But there are big ifs.

And the biggest one is whether you can shed any anger you still hold against the employer who downsized or otherwise forced you into early retirement, said John Carney, who has devoted the last nine years to finding work for "mature workers."

"If you're feeling sorry for yourself or holding a grudge against a previous employer, you probably won't get meaningful work," Carney said.

He said truly letting go of the anger is critical because "no matter how great an actor or actress you are, you can't mask it."

Employers won't hire people who are angry.

"They think 'if I hire this person, it won't be long before they are moaning and groaning here,'" Carney said.

There are other ifs — mainly related to computer skills.

Job prospects are better for people who know Microsoft Corp.'s Windows operating system. And it is important to have decent skills using the Internet and word-processing, spreadsheet, relational-database and presentation software.

Older workers' lack of computer skills were a big problem when Carney and his wife, Nanette, started their employment firm, the Carney Group, in the Philadelphia suburbs nine years ago.

In those days, many executives forced out by downsizing or corporate mergers had enjoyed letting secretaries do the computer work. Many resented having to learn the skills.

But now, most "mature workers," as the Carneys call their clients, have obtained those skills on the job or know to take a course before seeking employment.

Much has changed for the Carney Group, too.

When the Carneys started their company in May 1992, older workers were out of favor. The first banks they approached for start-up financing literally laughed at them.

They struggled early on, working long days, seven days a week, out of a tiny office. They shared one desk and one telephone.

Now, their staff has grown to six in the headquarters. About 400 more are working in full- or part-time jobs through their company.

About half of these part-time workers are in the special-events division, which provides highly skilled staffing for trade shows and conventions.

The others on Carney's payroll are rented to companies as consultants — or to fill temporary positions or han-

See CAREERS on F8

## Agency places 'mature workers'

CAREERS from F1  
die special projects.

The Carney Group recently moved into larger quarters at 653 Skippack Pike in Blue Bell. And last year, its founders were inducted into the Pennsylvania Hall of Fame of Champions of Older Workers.

She is the firm's chief executive officer. He is the president.

They are both former employees of International Business Machines Corp. Nanette Carney had taken off to raise their seven children when John Carney, at age 50, saw his career as a recruiter come to an end during a period of major downsizing.

"I felt like I had more to give," he said.

So they sat down to figure out how to do what he had done as a recruiter for IBM. They were going to focus on workers in situations similar to theirs: Their target clients were to be those who had been forced into early retirement, or who had a desire or need to return to work after retiring.

The Carneys studied the barriers to getting hired as a mature worker. They found, for example, that many companies were unwilling to hire older workers out of fear of age-discrimination lawsuits if things did not work out and the employment had to be terminated.

So the Carneys got bank financing that let them hire mature workers and rent them to employers.

"We assumed the risk," John Carney said.

Old-fashioned networking, calling people you have known for years, doesn't work as well as it once did, particularly for older workers, the Carneys found.

Once employers see the older workers they have rented in action, most hire the workers. Other older workers get jobs based on recommendations from bosses who have seen them in these new roles.

The jobs these older workers get are often on what the Carneys call the "hidden job market": jobs that never get posted on the bulletin board or advertised in the paper.

Someone quits, or a need aris-



Nanette and John Carney founded the company. She is the chief executive officer. He is the president. Their clients are people who are forced into early retirement or who return to work after retiring.

es, and the worker rented from Carney gets the position.

The Carneys spend a long time in the initial interview. They said it is better to spend extra time helping a person turn around a negative quality than to place him or her in a job where the person may damage the reputation of older workers.

### The Carney Group, which was started in 1992, recently moved into larger quarters in Blue Bell.

They coach people on how to transform resumes from "a mere recitation of their employment history" into a tool for marketing their skills, John Carney said.

"We only get paid if we put somebody to work," Nanette Carney said.

They help people work through the transition from being an old pro to starting a new career, and they encourage new careers.

It is "prudent" for people who have been downsized out of a job in a shrinking industry to leave that industry rather than risk being laid off again, John Carney said.

The Carney Group is growing for two main reasons, he said.

The first reason is demographics.

There are not enough younger workers to fill many types of jobs.

The second reason is that the people they have placed are doing good work and wiping out the stigma of being an older worker.

And they are often the most dependable, John Carney said.

"After the last snowstorm, one of our employers called and said our people were the only ones who showed up. None of the yuppies made it in."

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