

50plus - (self-) underestimated potential

There is a lot of talk about the opportunities of the 50-plus generation on the labour market: Employers have to rethink and use this potential in the course of the skills shortage. I agree! But many of the people concerned should also believe in themselves more and point out their advantages.

Peter Näf

One of my first outplacement clients was a successful 50-year-old financial specialist. I knew his name from my time as a headhunter and he had an excellent reputation. I was all the more surprised at the extent of his despair over his dismissal due to the closing of the department. He was convinced that no one would hire him again; after all, he was 50 and he didn't really have anything special to offer.

A case of Impostor Syndrome

Now, it is not unusual for people to get into a crisis due to the shock of an unexpected dismissal. But my client could not be convinced for a long time that he had something to offer and that his know-how was in demand.

What is the basis for this misjudgement of one's own abilities, especially among people 50 plus? I can only explain it on the basis of the competence development model. According to this view, we grow from the state of unconscious incompetence - we don't know that we can't do something - into the state of conscious incompetence. This is what we are confronted with when we face new challenges. This drives us to develop the competencies through practical experience as well as further education. Once we have acquired skills and knowledge, we are consciously competent. If we apply the competencies over and over again, we function increasingly

automatically and thus unconsciously. The financial specialist in my example had been working in his field for over 20 years and was correspondingly experienced. He has increasingly taken his competences for granted and perceived them as nothing special.

Storytelling strengthens self-confidence

Most people over 50 have the following experience when they are confronted with young people: They see their abilities, which they themselves no longer have (or can have) to the same extent: Speed, quick comprehension, a lot of energy, openness for new things, familiarity with new concepts and tools, etc. If at the same time they do not recognise their own competences, which they have only acquired through experience, e.g., patience, farsightedness, recognition of complex contexts, will to persevere, etc., they inevitably feel deficient.

The development from conscious to unconscious competence goes largely unnoticed. Therefore, it is important to counteract this. Becoming aware of one's own strengths with storytelling is a helpful tool if it is used regularly.

And it is important to look for jobs that match today's skills and to acknowledge that we are no longer eligible for certain tasks.

After all, as a 50-plus you would not engage in a 100-metre sprint in sporting competition with younger people, but would prefer a marathon, in which you can no longer compete with youthful drive, but instead with the pound of your experience.

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