"In desperation, I revised my resume, taking 11 years off my age. Within two months I had a job. Seven years later, even though I had received merit increases and additional responsibilities every year, I was mandatorily retired at age 70-I was 81 but as able physically and mentally as when I was hired."

An inspiring and sad story of an older able worker forced out of a job because of age. Contrary to the so-called golden years concept, current statistics show that approximately half of today's retirees 55 years old or more are not happy living in the world of retirement. And why should they be? They are members of the "new young," healthy, vigorous professionals-with skills they are eager to use in full- or part-time employment, skills honed during difficult times. Individuals such as the letter writer and countless others like him have already demonstrated that ability is ageless. Companies currently employing mature professionals 50 years or older have discovered that, like fine wine, they get better with age.

This is also borne out by a number of recent studies that show mature workers bring much-needed skills to the corporate workplace.

It's Not Easy

Despite changing attitudes by many corporations and individuals in the business world, discrimination against older people in the workplace does exist, especially against minorities and women. Be prepared for it. The older professional worker may find it especially difficult to find a job, but it is by no means impossible. It helps a great deal to know what you want to do. If you've been out of the job market for some time-as a woman returning to the workplace after many years, or a retired person reentering the job market - planning, patience, and persistence will be the keys that unlock the door to your new career. If ability is ageless, a good attitude is contagious. A positive attitude is a must for a job seeker at any age.

Ability Is Ageless

Many people who attain the age of 50 or more years have a tendency to put themselves down, to develop a defeatist attitude that they can't compete with younger people or do a good job. You've heard them say, "I'm too old for that," or "I can't get a new job at my age. Who would hire me?"

This attitude is disturbing because many of us don't always appreciate, or fail to understand, the many valuable talents we've nurtured and the experience we've acquired over the years. More and more the talents of older workers are being recognized in both the private and public sector. For example, a recent Wall Street Journal poll found that 84 percent of personnel managers felt that older workers are more productive than their younger counterparts. And President Bush, in his 1988 inaugural address, speaking of a new kind of activism, noted the importance of older workers when he said, "And I am speaking of a new engagement in the lives of others-a new activism, hands-on and involved, that gets the job done.

We must bring in the generations, harnessing the unused talent of the elderly and the unfocused energy of the young. For not only is leadership passed from generation to generation, so is stewardship. And the generation born after the Second World War has come of age." That ability is ageless is not a glib phrase but a proven fact.

"Chronological age has nothing to do with one's functional capacity," says Joyce Welsh, director of corporate employment programs at the National Council on Aging, Inc., in Washington, D.C., a private nonprofit organization working to meet the current and changing needs of older persons, and to tap the abilities they can offer to the nation. Since 1950 NOCA has served as a resource for program development, research training, technical assistance, and publications on all aspects of aging. "Intellectual capacity does not begin to diminish until well into the 70s," she says. "And in many individuals it does not diminish."

You Remain What You Are. NOCA studies show that age does not significantly alter the ability of older workers in such areas as speed,
NOCA studies show that age does not significantly alter the ability of older workers in such areas as speed, attentiveness to detail, stamina, and accuracy.

"In some areas," according to the studies, "such as attentiveness, which requires concentration and accuracy, there is a general increase in performance as workers age." The study also states that older workers have "fewer accidents on the job than their younger associates," fewer sick days. The ability to learn new things has also been demonstrated, says NOCA, citing cases where older workers in companies adapted to new procedures as competently as their younger counterparts. The study also showed that basic personalities do not change. For example, a flexible personality remains flexible in old age, whereas a rigid personality will become more so in later years.