



ebook

National Older Workers Week 2021

workingwise

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National Older Workers Week 2021

In November 2021 [workingwise.co.uk](https://www.workingwise.co.uk) held the first National Older Workers Week, sponsored by QA, with four online events on different aspects of best practice and supporting older workers, from age discrimination and recruitment to managing multigenerational teams. A survey published for the Week highlighted widespread perceptions of ageism in the recruitment process. Other studies showed a disconnect between employee perceptions and employer awareness when it comes to ageism.

This report covers discussions during that Week as well as employee case studies.



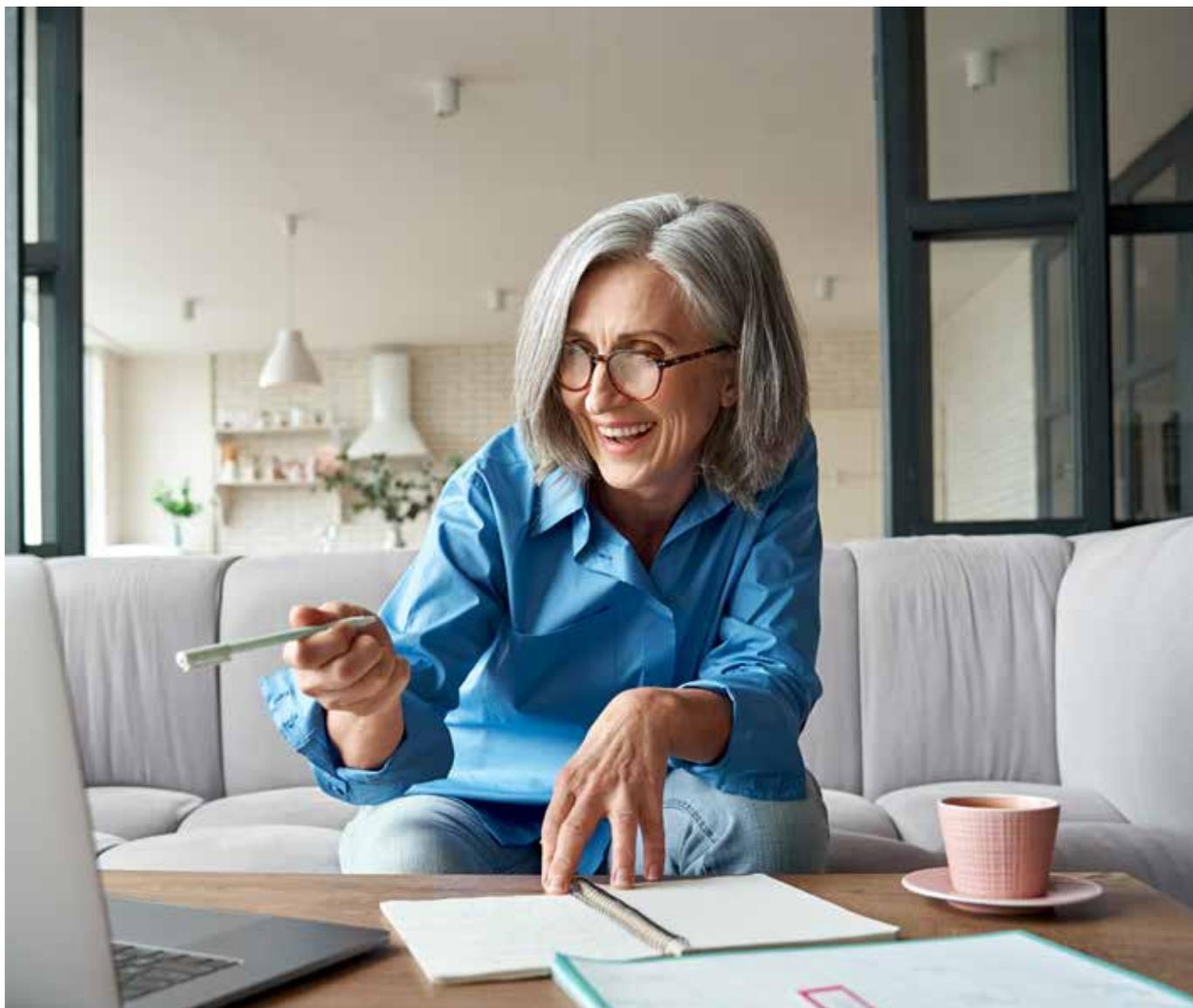
Introduction

National Older Worker Week came after a turbulent year for older workers which began with worries about the impact of redundancy and furlough, given older workers were more likely in late 2020/2021 to have left work, been made redundant or taken early retirement and face more difficulties finding new jobs.

The Institute for Employment Studies say more needs to be done to bring older workers, particularly older women, back into the labour market to address the skills shortage. One report found that the number of older workers and young men in the workforce has dropped significantly during Covid, while the number of working mums has increased. Skills shortages have been a big feature of the labour market in the last months, which many see as a way of galvanising greater moves towards flexible working, given the need to widen the talent pool. Towards the end of the year the Government said it would extend the Plan for Jobs to include a package of support for older workers.

2021 also saw more employers publishing menopause policies and a new government taskforce was set up to look at the menopause, including workplace issues. The Women and Equalities Committee is considering whether legislation is needed for women who drop out of the workforce due to lack of support.

On wider health issues, the Business4Health initiative launched a new framework and called on employers to focus on health issues, whether for their workforce, their consumers or the wider community as ONS



figures showed a big increase since 2019 in older workers not working due to long-term or temporary ill health.

Other issues on older workers included a Carers UK survey showing the growth in working carers as a result of the pandemic and an analysis of pension contributions by PensionBee found the gender pension gap remained at around 40%. Meanwhile, on the positive side, Saga announced a new paid grandparent leave policy.

So it was a year of change and challenge and one where, despite rising concerns

about inequality on many fronts, there were also some positive signs.

This ebook looks at some of these challenges, as well as presenting practical advice for getting a new job and inspirational stories of older workers who have changed careers.

National Older Workers Week survey results – what older workers want

Workingwise.co.uk published the results of its survey into older workers' experience of working, looking for a job and Covid to kick off the first National Older Workers Week. We outline the results below.

Workingwise.co.uk's survey is based on the responses from around 2,000 respondents, 22% of whom are looking for a job. Most – 67% – were in the 56-66 age range and they spanned a wide range of sectors, with healthcare and medical being the most represented, followed by administration and secretarial, retail and education. 37% of them work full time in the workplace compared to 13% who work remotely or hybrid full time. The rest work part time, with 30% working part time in a workplace. Interestingly, less than 1% do a job share despite the figures showing a big appetite for this. 51% said they would like to do a job share.

There was a big interest in reducing hours and in work life balance generally. Work life balance is important or very important for 94%. This compares to 79% who said salary was important or very important and 85% who said job security was important or very important.

86% said what they look for in work has changed since they were young, with the desire for greater work life balance being the factor that had changed the most.

What is important to you when it comes to work?

Work life balance is important or very important for **94%**



This compares to **79%** who said salary was important or very important and:

85% who said job security was important or very important.

39% said flexible working is a deal breaker in taking a job, mainly due to work life balance.

Meanwhile, 72% would like to reduce their hours [39% of these would like to, but can't afford to]. One reason is carer and grandparent responsibilities which apply to 46% of respondents.

Greater flexibility and control over hours is the leading factor in their interest in self employment as well. 71% have not been put off self employment by the pandemic.

When it comes to their experience in the workplace, 55% said they had encountered ageism in the recruitment process versus 12% who hadn't. The rest were unsure either way.

44% had altered their CV, compared to 35% who had not, to disguise their age because of perceived ageism in the recruitment

process. The area where there is most perceived ageism is in the applications process [55% said this compared to 34% who said they had encountered bias in the interview process].

When it comes to career progression, 86% said they have not been promoted in the last five years. 54% have had no access to training recently, with 30% saying this is because training is mainly aimed at young people in their organisation and 11% saying because it is mostly reserved for full-time workers. Nevertheless, 85% are open to learning new skills.

However, when it comes to the kind of soft skills much sought after by employers which are based on life experience, 75%

Have you been promoted in the last 5 years?



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11% say because it is mostly **reserved for full-time workers**.

85% are open to **learning new skills**.

Have you ever encountered ageism in the recruitment process?



55% said they had encountered ageism in the recruitment process versus

12% who hadn't.

44% had altered their cv compare to **35%**

who did not, to disguise their age because of perceived ageism in the recruitment process.

said theirs are not valued enough by employers.

Respondents were divided about whether they would recommend their employer when it came to its policies and practices for older workers: 22% said their employer is not great and 7% said their employer is bad. This compares with 14% who said their employer is excellent and 27% who said they are good. The rest expressed no opinion. 30% said they would not recommend their employer to other older workers.

Respondents were asked about their experience over the course of the pandemic. 14% were furloughed at some point during the pandemic. Of those furloughed, 25% said they feel less secure as a result; 30% feel less confident generally; 26% have struggled financially; 21% have had time to think about what they want; and 35% have enjoyed their time on furlough.

When it comes to their health, 56% said their mental health had gone downhill due to Covid. This is mostly due to fears for their or their family's safety and health [55% said this], with general anxiety related to the pandemic being the second highest factor. 19% said it was due to isolation from remote working, the lowest of all the potential factors on the list, including financial worries, job security and juggling work and life. 10% had to apply for Universal Credit during the pandemic.

There is evidence of older workers facing challenges finding a job after being made redundant during the pandemic, with other research showing older workers

If you found a new job within the last 5 years, how long did it take?



38%

of those made redundant during the pandemic said they are still looking for a job more than a year after being made redundant.

16%

having been looking for between six and twelve months.

58%

of those who found it hard to find a job said their age was a factor.

Compared to **20%** who said it wasn't.

tend to take longer to get back into a job. 19% were made redundant during the pandemic. 38% of those made redundant during the pandemic said they are still looking for a job more than a year after being made redundant, with 16% having been looking for between six and 12 months. 73% said the length of time they had been looking had affected their confidence.

We looked more closely at longer term patterns with regard to redundancy. 15% of those who have found a job in the last



five years had been out of a job for more than a year; and 13% had been out of work for between six and 12 months. 58% of those who found it hard to find a job said their age was a factor compared to 20% who said it wasn't. 54% of those who were looking for work said they would like more support in making job applications.

Some of the respondents are not currently looking for work. 16% were not looking for work due to caring or grandparent responsibilities; 24% due to health concerns and 9% specifically due to Covid concerns. Asked what might tempt them back, 41% said more flexible working. This compares to 15% who said higher wages.

We also asked respondents about what they planned to do over the next five years. There was a mix of replies: 25% want to reduce their hours; 34% want to retire and

28% want to find a new job. Many of those who had changed jobs had switched to a new sector. 54% had changed sectors the last time they got a job.

The findings were backed up by nine in-depth case studies of those who have been out of work for some time, with many of those interviewed saying that they disguise their age due to a firmly held perception that this is hindering their job search. While they often can't point to a blatant example of ageism in the application process, all of them said that things like body language and tone when they did get an interview suggested that they wouldn't be successful. Several said that recruiters had advised them to disguise their age. One man in his mid 50s was told to knock 12 years off his CV by a recruitment consultant.

Tips for how to find a job you love

One of the webinars for National Older Workers Week aimed to help job seekers understand what motivates them and where to look for jobs that suit their skills and values. It also sought to provide advice on how to change career path and get the confidence to make positive changes to find the best job for them.

The first topic tackled by the panelists and the starting point for any job seeker was considering what your purpose is so that you can find a meaningful job. The advice coach and employment law expert Lorna Valcin gives to job seekers is to reflect on what your values and passions are now because "when you've discovered them, then you've got a clearer idea about what you should be doing".

Valcin posed that question to herself not so long ago when she decided to become a qualified life coach after more than 30 years of work as a solicitor. She decided to set up a life coaching business helping people make changes in their lives and career so they can live according to their true values.

Another question Valcin suggests jobseekers ask, as they look back at their life so far, is: "What have I done that has really made a difference to me as a person and also to other people? What have I done in my life that I've been really passionate about?"

Starting from these questions, you start to visualise what you would like to focus on and how to make that happen as you



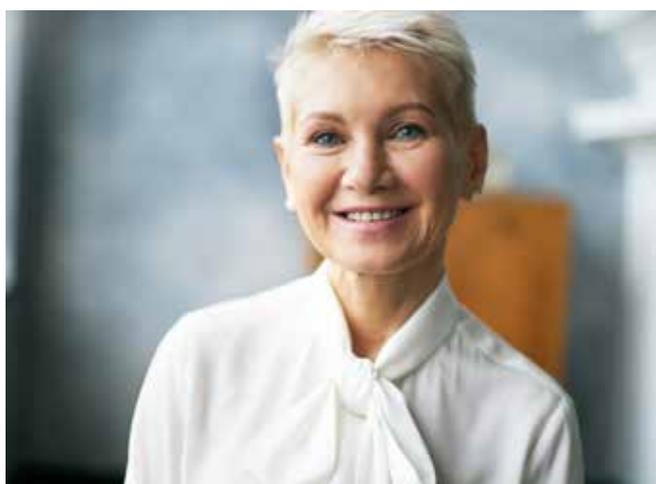
look for a new job. "It's now not just about getting a job," explains Valcin. "When we were younger, we went into a job for all sorts of reasons, career, money... As you get older, you get wiser and it's not that those those things are not important; they're just not as high on the priority list."

Another important aspect when reflecting on what the next step should be is giving yourself the time to do so. When Sara Wilce was made redundant for the third time at the age of 60, she also asked herself those questions, but to finally reach a conclusion that worked for her she had to allow herself to take a break from frantic job searches and think about what she really wanted from her life and career.

Wilce, who worked in the airline industry, decided that she did not want to go back into full-time employment and started her own project to help others with their CVs. "It is difficult to stay positive, particularly if you are looking for a long period of time. But don't just apply for everything you see,

that can be so demoralising because you will get rejection after rejection," she said. She added, that if possible, people should restrict the time they spend on applying for jobs. "Don't spend all day job hunting as that's also demoralising," she stated.

She advised focusing on the options that seem a good fit and which add value to your life, then moving to your CV.



As you reflect on what you would like to get out of your next job, it is not unusual to find yourself outside of your comfort zone or what you might have identified as your field of expertise.

The first tip from John Lees, career transition coach and author of the UK best-seller *How to Get a Job You Love*, is to do your research. "I don't mean desperate research, sitting all day at the keyboard. I mean talking to people, having conversations that really unearth what's going on in the sector, what skills are really useful," Lees said.

Doing so will show commitment and interest and Lees suggests that the same degree of energy is really important when

thinking about transferable skills. "What a lot of people don't appreciate about transferable skills is that the only person who makes transferable skills transfer is you and that's because what you're doing is translating them into the language of the new context," he explained.

Translating skills into the words used by employers in a particular sector not only shows you understand the sector, but also that you find it interesting. According to Lees, your interest is best expressed in your CV or cover letter which tell a story about your skills, backed up by evidence in the language that the employer expects to hear.

According to Lees, one of the reasons so many CVs fail to attract the attention of employers is that they put distracting information at the top. "The bits that really matter about what are you really good at, what you understand and what you can bring to work right now, that's hidden away in different places," he said.

Another issue relating to CVs for older workers is condensing many years of experience into one page, the opposite issue of someone who is at the beginning of their career. Making sure that the most relevant experience are at the top and easy to find can help to make your application stand out.

Some people also wonder whether they should include their age in their CVs and they worry they could be discriminated against for being "older". According to Lees, there is no need to draw attention to your age because it is not the most important piece of information about you.

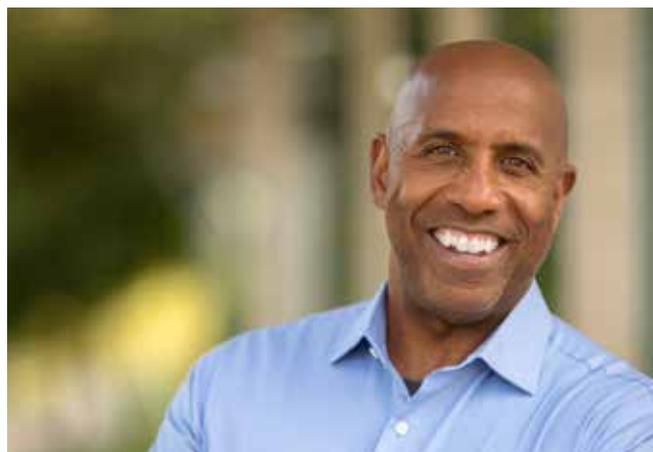
He said: "It's not the thing you want to bring to somebody's attention [...] So what you're doing in the CV is saying, 'What do I want to put in the spotlight, front and centre,' and it's usually going to be about skills that you can bring."

He also suggested having positive-minded supporters when applying for new positions. These do not have to be professional career coaches, but can be friends "who remind you what you're good at and help you deal with difficult questions".

Similarly, Katie Waldegrave, Director of Now Teach, a company that supports workers who are transitioning into teaching, said: "We have ongoing support and a network because it's a really weird thing to do to begin all over again. You have to, on an existential level, disentangle your personal and professional selves." She added: "And to do that with another group of people who are already doing it and surrounding yourself with like-minded people is very important."

Another panelist on the webinar who changed her career two years ago was Jo Bishenden, now Director Of Education at QA, sponsor of National Older Workers Week. Bishenden said: "My current career wasn't doing it for me, it wasn't driving me, it wasn't making me want to wake up and work [...] and I made a very deliberate decision that I was moving off the career ladder and moving to a career web. I needed to find a way that I could move around my career in the right way."

That is when she applied for a role at QA. "I was a bit of an apologist for it at the



time, I can remember going to QA saying, 'I'm really sorry, I haven't been in my last job that long, but I really want to come work for you,' and that was because at QA there's this idea that there's a learning revolution going on and we need to break down some of these barriers to gaining new skills," she stated.

One of these barriers is around technology and QA is now trying to break away from the idea that it is only new graduates who can learn about it and that innovation has to be something completely new.

Bishenden said: "Innovation can be anything that has been tried and tested elsewhere and brought into a new situation, and experience and transferable skills can also bring new fresh outlooks... Some new thoughts and new ideas from a different industry, regardless of age, is exactly what can turn innovation and turn that wheel forward."

She also mentioned the importance of recognising different learning styles as an organisation and having a very agile and diverse workforce. With learners being at different stages, some might be looking for an apprenticeship and others for further up-skilling, she said.

Sue Eilfield, Vice President, People & Culture at Coca Cola Europacific Partners, sponsor of the webinar, said they also have a similar approach.

She said: "There are learning opportunities for absolutely everyone [...] and there's so much you can do even before joining an organisation to up-skill yourself on what digital and technology aspects there are. But it's also about just being curious, finding people and networks to connect to and building relationships."

There are many ways to up-skill, whether you are in an organisation or not, but one trait that the panelists agreed was essential is curiosity and a passion for learning.



Advice and support

Our careers experts, John Lees and Liz Sebag-Montefiore, answer readers' questions regularly and give advice on some of the common challenges.

John Lees is one of the UK's best-known career strategists and author of 15 books on work and careers. Formerly Chief Executive of the Institute of Employment Consultants, John's expertise as a careers specialist is also sought by a wide range of commercial organisations, universities and business schools.
www.johnleescareers.com.

Liz Sebag-Montefiore is a career coach and Director of 10Eighty, a strengths-based HR consultancy. For more information, please visit
www.10Eighty.co.uk.



John Lees on how to write your cv if you want to change sectors:

A lot of people are changing sectors at the moment, so don't feel what you are doing is unusual.

Spend time talking to people in your target sector to really get under the skin of jobs you find interesting, and find out what terminology needs to be in your CV. Describe your transferable skills in language that organisations not only understand, but get excited about.

In-depth research not only decodes jobs for you, but also shows that you are committed to change. This is reinforced by any kind of work experience/ internship you can arrange.

Manage the opening of your CV and LinkedIn profile so you stress the skills and experience that should work well in a new role – for example, use of IT, problem solving and customer service.

Liz Sebag-Montefiore on how to prepare for a video interview:

It can be exciting yet daunting when you get your first interview, and possibly harder for some when it's a video interview if you've never interviewed virtually before or if you haven't interviewed in a while.

What are the benefits of interview preparation?

- Helps you feel more confident
- Creates a positive impression
- Shows that you are interested
- Improves interview performance
- Demonstrates that you plan and prepare!
- Fail to prepare, prepare to fail!



Whilst there is a lot of preparation to be done, there are also many resources easily available to assist.

Resources to help you:

- LinkedIn
- ZoomInfo – A platform which employs automated machine learning to constantly scan corporate websites, news article, SEC filings, job postings, and other sources for information about industries, locations, revenue and more
- Companies House – A government agency which incorporates, and dissolves companies and allows the public to see basic information about them
- Glassdoor – A site which allows you to view reviews from people who have worked within organisations

- Recent press articles: successes and challenges
- Your extended network: ask around

Top 10 tips on how to prepare for a video interview:

1. Find a quiet space and a neutral background
2. If you've got children, it's best to check that they haven't changed the Zoom background or your Zoom name
3. Make sure nobody in the household is streaming and could really affect your Broadband as it will affect the rhythm between you and your interviewer
4. You need your camera to be slightly above eyelevel so you're slightly tilting your head up a bit
5. Ensure the space is well lit, ideally the light source should be in front of you and behind the camera
6. Wear business clothes, even shoes. It'll make a difference to how you feel and how you respond to the questions. Aim to be the smartest person in the 'room'. Sometimes things can be billed as a phone interview and last minute can get changed to Zoom or FaceTime
7. If you do have a phone interview don't forget to smile – it changes the timbre of your voice and if you have confidence in yourself, so will the interviewer
8. Practice – you can record yourself on Zoom so you can see what it feels like and play that back

9. If things don't go to plan (e.g. your son's started to play the drums, the dog has come in, someone's started streaming a film) don't forget we are in this all together. Any interviewer worth their salt will be supportive so don't be rattled and let your talents shine through

10. It's important to think about your posture and there are a couple of options e.g. using a chair with no arms as there is nowhere to rest your arms which may make you a little more animated. It's also important not to be 'a cardboard cut-out' – try not to sit too still! Some people find more energy and focus by conducting interviews standing up, so it's best to practice beforehand to see what works for you.

Often mid-morning is the ideal time of day to be interviewed, if you are able to influence the start time. It gives time to do last-minute prep, but not too much that you sit around waiting and being nervous.



It's important to consider how to avoid talking over the interviewer. In virtual interviews it's difficult to know when the interviewer has stopped talking, so it's important to be aware of any time lags and try to anticipate them. If you do speak over the interviewer, apologise and wait to continue. Try to embrace the silence – don't worry about filling gaps sometimes. It's also important to prepare for virtual interviews with different time zones, trying to make a mutually convenient time for both parties whilst being aware of time lags during the session.

Also, you might want to buy a desktop whiteboard to place notes/prep next to the screen if there's a lot to remember.

Most interviews have challenging questions; if you struggle to answer them, you can buy yourself a bit of time by saying "that's a great question" or "Can you repeat the question please?" or even "that's not something I've thought about but..." and then try to come up with something. As part of your prep, think about all the awful questions you might get and try to be prepared for those. Read the job spec in detail so you know it inside out and hopefully you will be able to come up with something. However, if you really can't answer the question, be honest. Say that, and maybe go back after the interview with an answer once you've thought about it some more. It will show real interest in the job and bravery!

Working life stories

These profiles show how different older workers have negotiated their careers, including in their later years, and may provide ideas and inspiration about potential pathways to take.

Peter Penny



Peter Penny says his life could be a Netflix show with different series and episodes. He started off at art college in his teens and did some paid work in the summer at a studio which he found more interesting than his course. Because he was spending more time there than at college he got expelled. Soon after his father died, Peter decided to take off to Italy, ending up in Rome where he got a job washing dishes.

Then came the opportunity to work in a photography dark room. Peter fell in love almost instantly with life behind the camera lens. The senior photographer at the studio was very creative and assertive. "He had me and the other assistant running everywhere," says Peter, adding that the photographer encouraged him to do a photography course on the side of his

work. The studio worked on a variety of projects, from photographing cosmetics and beauty products to doing romantic photo stories for magazines.

On his return to the UK in the late 1960s, Peter had an interesting CV, the time in Rome adding a certain sense of romance. He soon got a job on a cosmetics project and ended up working for the team that did the photography for fashion designer Mary Quant. At the time Mary Quant was expanding into cosmetics. Peter's background was perfect for this and from there he went on to work regularly for the brand, progressing from photographing Mary Quant cosmetics to designing a daisy-shaped counter for her for Harrods. Over the next years he rubbed shoulders with everyone from David Hockney to Elizabeth Frink. "They were amazing people, but I didn't really realise who they were," he says of that time.

From there he moved further into promotional work and went freelance. He started filming in different parts of the world for large companies with big budgets. He worked, for instance, on glamorous shoots for the launch of new cars, including Hertz Europe's luxury car service, Prestige, shooting in Paris, Berlin and Rome, using helicopters and borrowing ideas from James Bond films to give the adverts extra drama. One job led to another.

Peter travelled across the world, from Africa to the US and Canada and all over Europe, including Monte Carlo, at a time when travel to remote areas was slightly more complicated than it is today. The main agency he worked in the 1970s

was Mitchell Monkhouse Associates. It was the start of commercial tv and the company was involved in writing jingles for tv adverts. It got taken over by Saatchi & Saatchi. Peter says it was fascinating being in at the beginning of a tv revolution.

Peter was also in at the start of the move from film to video and the later evolution from video to digital as filming became more mobile. In the 1980s, a time of big stadium rock shows and exotic videos, he worked on the launch of British Airways and big name brands such as Xerox, IBM and Dell.

Sometimes his family would come along with him on projects. He recalls a family stay in Monte Carlo and in the Seychelles. "It was glamorous for all of us," he says, although when he couldn't take his family it could sometimes be difficult to keep in touch. He remembers one long project in Mauritius where he had to book a call to his family and it might take hours to get through.

"I wanted to look at how I could help others rather than just talk about it"

In 2002, when his son graduated from Bristol Old Vic theatre school and decided a career in the Royal Shakespeare Company was not for him, Peter set up a film and documentary company with him called Connected Pictures. His son had grown up with Peter's work and knew the area of commercials, documentaries and corporate films well. "We set up the company to build on our past," says Peter.

His son has stayed with the company and developed it further. Now the focus is on creating a unique cross platform experience and insight to create deeper connections between brands, businesses, organisations and their audiences. The company is focused increasingly on the idea of purpose over profit and has set up an editorial site and consultancy called thebeautifultruth.org.uk.

The business started two years after Peter's wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. Within four or five years she was given the all-clear. However, in 2010 she collapsed and was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Doctors tried to remove it, but couldn't get all of it. She died just before Christmas.

Peter spent the next year climbing a mountain a month across the world to raise funds for a brain tumour charity and he is writing a book about this experience, describing how it helped him to move forwards.

Work with purpose

His grief also drove him to find more purposeful work and to get more involved in community projects. He made some films off his own back, including one in India getting children in slum areas to tell their stories to raise funds for charity. This came about through a contact at the NSPCC. Peter describes interviewing one girl who was married at 14 and lost her first two children. Connected Pictures has also done some films about health programmes in Peru and Africa.

Peter has also stepped back from Connected Pictures in the last few years to focus on coaching others. "I wanted to look at how I could help others rather than just talk about it," he says. He took courses on mindfulness and psychology at Oxford and now works with a partner Teresa Havvas who is an experienced tutor. Both of them lecture on these subjects and on being entrepreneurial in a creative field. Throughout the pandemic he has been helping his clients and says he has seen how Covid has caused people to rethink their lives. "They are asking themselves what is important and what is not," he says. It's about opening up the possibilities people face and about giving people both the ability to understand what drives them but also the tools to do something more creative.

Peter has certainly lived a full life – a life of many episodes and series – and now his focus, like many in their later years, is on making a difference and helping others to do so too.

Jaz Ampaw-Farr



After a horrific and abusive childhood, Jaz Ampaw-Farr, who is in her 50s, has become one of the world's leading keynote speakers and has recently transferred her skills to the virtual world. Jaz draws on her own life experiences to help others make the changes that can achieve a better life and career.

As a child, she went care home to care home, was horrifically abused and later married a vicar a decade older than her. When that marriage ended, she was in the "gutter and homeless". But she picked herself up and went on to become a teacher, have a loving family, launch an educational consultancy and is now a hugely successful international keynote speaker.

Oh, and she once appeared on the BBC's Apprentice programme where she volunteered for the first task within nanoseconds, only to be voted out in the first round. She says that now enables her to talk about failure too and that and her life experience make her much in demand.

"I'm brown, female, grew up in foster care and I was abused and working class. I tick a lot of boxes," she says.

For decades Jazz worked as a teacher, leaving when she was 30 to bring up her three children. She decided to become an educational consultant, working from home and went on to do a TEDx talk. "Things just blew up after that," she says. She was invited to do inspirational talks. One of her first was in California to a bunch of entrepreneurs.

"I got crippling anxiety. I said I couldn't do it. I had been smashing it. I was the Judi Dench of the education world. I was teaching until 30, and then had babies. I set up my own business as an educational consultant for 15 years, but I bottled it," she says.

In the end, she promised herself she would do the talk. Just for 60 seconds. Breaking it down enabled her to add more seconds until she realised she could do a longer talk. "From that point, I didn't go back," she says. She stopped listening to her inner critic and instead based her view of herself on the comments of those who booked her/wanted to book her and people she trusted. She ended up doing talks all around the world. But when Covid hit, she lost all of her work. "No events meant no talks," she says.

"I thought of doing talks about resilience and agility and about the need to reframe myself," she says. In the last three months, by shifting her talks online, she has been able to make more money in one month than she would in a year.

"People say about Covid that when we go back to normal, they'll do something about themselves or their situation, but they don't realise. We are not going back to 'normal'," she says. "This is it. We're not in a time machine. We have to rewrite things." This attitude is based on her own life. "I was constantly told 'you're not going to finish school, get a degree, be a teacher and so I set those as my things to do,'" she states.

"If you want the truth about you, ask someone you trust. And believe them."

The message of her talks is: "If you want the truth about you, ask someone you trust. And believe them. Don't be the person the world told you to be. It becomes a habit."

For those who are finding making a change in their career or life difficult, Jaz recommends small, positive steps forward. "It's not about faking it until you make it. It's about small steps, being a bit brave, a bit kinder. It's either that or lay down and don't get up," she says, adding: "Choose something different for yourself until it becomes habit. Get out of your own way."

Sara Wilce



In summer 2020 Sara Wilce was made redundant from her corporate job at TUI. She had just turned 60. Although she has been made redundant twice before in her career, she admits that this time redundancy hit her harder. "I thought no-one will take me on," she says. "A lot of it had to do with my age and a fear of putting myself out there when I am nearing retirement."

Although that feeling has now passed, Sara realised that many other people in the travel industry were in a similar situation during Covid, made redundant after years of service. So she decided to help them prepare to job search by setting up a CV advice service, New Startz. She says: "A lot of people – many of them cabin crew who had been in the industry for years – were asking the same questions as me and needed help. The first thing they say when they contact me is that they are 50+ and that they think no-one will take them on. That stigma is very much there."

She adds: "Much of what I do is convincing them that they have lots of transferable skills, such as customer service skills, and

that they have just as much chance as younger people of getting a job due to their experience, reliability and life skills. They don't see these as skills. Instead they say they are not very good on the computer, but that can be taught. No-one can teach you, for instance, how to maturely deal with a distressed customer."

Sara says sharing her own experiences of redundancy as well as other people's stories of finding jobs after redundancy can help to build people's confidence. She adds that it is also about choosing the right jobs to apply for. She says many of the older women who are made redundant from the airline industry apply for jobs in retail and hospitality which are very competitive, rather than those in customer service which play to their experience.

Other advice New Startz offers includes preparation for interviews given many may not have done any for years and advice on how to lay out their CV in a way that gets it past the computers and in front of a human.

Sara herself has had a full career. She trained as a beauty therapist after leaving school and worked in a salon, owned her own salon and started teaching beauty therapy when her children were little. Then an opportunity came up at Virgin Atlantic as a Training Officer, Hair and Beauty. Sara was soon head of department and spent eight years leading a team of beauty therapists, managers and trainers, moving from beauty work into leadership and management.

After being made redundant, Sara set up some beauty academies for leading brands before moving back into the airline

industry as base performance manager at TUI, managing cabin crew. She says the move into leadership, begun with Virgin Atlantic, opened up her skillset.

"I have moved from thinking no-one will take me on to feeling that I have got more than enough to offer employers."

Since being made redundant last year Sara has been marking assignments for the Institute of Leadership Management and the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, which brings together both her management skills and her teaching experience. "It is surprising when I look back where each step takes you and how it adds to what you have to offer," says Sara, adding that her experience of running a business has helped her set up New Startz.

She says she doesn't want to go back to a corporate role now, but she has not closed the door on employed work. She has enjoyed not having to commute during the pandemic and having the freedom to take up different consultancy possibilities and to work them around her life.

She feels much more confident too. "I have moved from thinking no-one will take me on to feeling that I have got more than enough to offer employers," she says. She adds that the pandemic has also given her – and many others who have been made redundant – the time to think about what they really want to do. "I know many people who have decided to make a break and do something completely different. That has to be positive."

Keith Grinsted



At just 68, Sudbury-based Keith Grinsted has been made redundant seven times. In between that he has had three divorces and two major health scares. Each time he has had to build himself back up again until, in 2016, everything hit him at once. Feeling like there was no point to do anything any more, he picked himself off the floor and launched Goodbye Lonely – an organisation to help others struggling with isolation.

Keith's story really is testament to the fact that, when you hit rock bottom, there's only one way up.

"At the moment I work in John Lewis department stores, mainly in Chelmsford, but I travel a bit too. I'd rather be busy and all of it sort of helps to pay for the work I'm doing with my Goodbye Lonely scheme."

He launched the venture in December 2020 after lockdown left him battling loneliness.

"I live on my own and have been married three times. I split up with my wife just under five years ago. I was living on my

own in a first floor flat during lockdown and it was a really scary time," he admits. "I had Covid back in February and was really, really ill. It was before Covid became a thing. And because I'm type two diabetic, I was worried. Nobody was wearing masks, and I started having panic attacks. I would go shopping in my local Sainsbury's and I'd hold my breath every time somebody got near me. I ended up so stressed I was having panic attacks."

"I was devastated. I'd just turned 60, and so it hit me harder than the other redundancies"

Keith says he stopped shopping, only going out every 12 days. In between he spent time alone, sitting alone in his flat.

"It was mentally draining because I wasn't getting out or interacting with anyone. I wouldn't even go out for exercise," he says. "I would sit in my bedroom window looking out, chatting to people walking by."

At the same time the company he was working for asked him to do some Wellbeing Wednesday work for its Facebook site. "I started doing lots of other things on the back of this, including setting up a whole thing around loneliness. I'm now planning to build an app and I've created a website and am planning a programme for December," he says.

In 2016, Keith came close to suicide. "I was diagnosed with bad type two diabetes and had a cancer scare. I split

with my wife of 20 years. That year I found myself in my sixties living in a flat on my own, sleeping on the floor because I didn't have any furniture," he says. "I've been made redundant seven times and with that comes being bankrupt."

But he adds with a smile: "Despite all the rubbish, I have two wonderful daughters."

Keith was also running an olderpreneur programme which fell by the wayside despite him getting publicity and funding for it. It aimed to help older people set up in business and find a new focus, a new sense of direction, or establish a new business, but it was hard to get people to engage.

Throughout his life, Keith says he has had to adapt to a lot. "I've been everything from a milkman to taxi driver to working in a software company."

The last few years are a case in point. Eight years ago he was made redundant from a job where he was running departmental stores. While preparing to give a presentation he was called in and asked to leave.

"I was told I didn't have a job anymore. I was asked to leave the meeting there and then so it didn't disrupt anyone. It was truly terrible. I was devastated. I'd just turned 60, and so it hit me harder than the other redundancies because it felt like the end of the world," he says.

Keith was already facing financial ruin after the impact of the first few redundancies. "I wasn't prepared to just give up," he says. Desperate to work, he ended up selling solar panels in a call centre where, despite

being the oldest by far – “my supervisor was 23” – he became their top salesman. “I just put the calls in,” he said.

About seven years ago he then joined a local taxi firm. “I loved picking up the old ladies from the supermarkets and chatting to them,” he says.

After that he joined Essex County Council, as a marketing manager. “I’ve always found it quite amusing because my background has been selling and management, yet I’ve had marketing manager roles,” he states. He worked for the council for a couple of years and was again made redundant in 2017 after a restructure.

“At that point, I’d had enough, I’d reached rock bottom. I didn’t want to work for anyone else” he says. “I decided to become a freelance writer. I got a contract to write for an online network about the economy for something that was called the Coding Academy.” This led to him meeting a publisher in New York and an 18-contract e-book deal. From then he went on to write an exam textbook for the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply, developed a blog and got other contracts.

Things were going well enough for Keith until 2019 when his business contracts fell by the wayside. “I got behind with my rent and was on the verge of being evicted,” he says.

Through a friend he ended up working as a traffic marshall for a company that was running car parks at events like New Market Racecourse.

He started to write again and is 30,000 words into his book, *It’s Okay to be Okay, Again*. He’s also now working as a coffee champion at Nespresso which he says he loves. He also stood for election to his local town council.

“Things are turning around. When you hit rock bottom you realise it’s now or never,” he says. “In 2019 I’d say my major achievement was coming off the antidepressants that I’ve been on for 10 years. I know it sounds cheesy, but my theme takes after that Elton John song: I’m still standing.”

How [workingwise.co.uk](https://www.workingwise.co.uk) can help you

If you need help with changing your working life, you can write in to [workingwise.co.uk](https://www.workingwise.co.uk)'s experts, who include careers experts Liz Sebag-Montefiore and John Lees as well as our panel of employment law experts.

Email info@workingwise.co.uk with your questions.

In addition to events for employers related to best practice for employing older workers, [workingwise.co.uk](https://www.workingwise.co.uk) also feeds the results of its regular surveys of older workers to policymakers and employers and updates the site daily with examples of best practice, news, profiles and features. It also holds practical events for candidates, such as the National Older Workers Week event detailed in this ebook. The next National Older Workers Week will be held in November 2022. Look out for updates on [workingwise.co.uk](https://www.workingwise.co.uk).

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