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Resumes & Job Hunt

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Career makeover: Construction project manager retools job search

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By **Cody Ellerd Bay** / Special to NWjobs

For nearly 20 years, Rita Maese-Noaker had her dream job. A project manager for a construction company, she enjoyed working with tenants and property managers and seeing multimillion-dollar building projects through to their completion.

Then, she was laid off nearly two years ago, and she has been hunting for a new job ever since.

"I started looking immediately and discovered it was a difficult field to get back into," says the Lynnwood resident, 55. "Contractor friends were telling me that for every job posting, they were getting 1,500 resumes."



Rita Maese-Noaker, a construction project manager, hopes to leverage her experience into a new position in her field. (Cody Ellerd Bay / Special to NWjobs)

Maese-Noaker decided to try to parlay her project-management skills into an industry that hadn't been so hard-hit by the economic downturn. She quickly realized that job hunting is entirely different than it was 20 years ago. Not only was she feeling daunted by the computerized submission systems, but after a couple of disheartening interviews, she also began feeling insecure about being an older worker, and about the fact that she didn't have a college degree.

Maese-Noaker was selected for a NWjobs career makeover and brought her concerns to three career coaches who worked with her to see how she could approach her search more successfully.

Matt Youngquist, president of **Career Horizons**, says that job seekers looking to shift to another industry simply can't rely on resume submissions alone. "These days, if you're not near-perfect on paper, it's going to be tough," he says. "For the vast majority of us who are underdogs, we need to focus on relationships."

Youngquist referred Maese-Noaker to several online networking groups and stressed the importance of following up after making initial contact. She picked up tips on how to get out in front of the pack: researching companies she's interested in working for, making inquiries directly to hiring managers and following up a couple weeks later to keep her presence in their minds.

"You have to really put in the effort to maintain the relationship," Maese-Noaker says. She also cleaned up her LinkedIn presence by consolidating her three active profiles into one, filling out the incomplete sections and replacing her casual profile photo with one that looks more professional.

Career coach **Lisa Quast** of **Career Woman Inc.**, who helped Maese-Noaker on her interviewing techniques, taught her how to turn the question of a college degree around to her benefit. "Rita doesn't have a college degree, but she does have over 15 years' experience managing multimillion-dollar construction projects," Quast wrote in her assessment.

By responding with information about the courses and seminars she has taken during her career as well as the successful projects she has managed, Quast says, Maese-Noaker "can turn the lack of a college degree into a non-issue during interviews."



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As for her age, career coach Seia Milin -- who helped Maese-Noaker revamp her resume -- told her that it's only an issue if she makes it one. "Anyone over 40 is classified as a 'mature worker,' but she is highly employable," Milin says. "The barriers she is associating with age in fact are coming from being in the construction industry. The real concern is that her field is not recovering at the pace she would like to see."

Milin says that Maese-Noaker's resume was underselling her skills, focusing too much on construction-specific points that don't mean much in other industries. "We want to take the construction terminology out of her resume and focus on her skills as a project manager." Maese-Noaker has decided to put those skills to use on the project of finding herself a new job.

"I'm going to set up a schedule every day, stick to it and follow it through," she says. "It's about getting over that fear of feeling inadequate and being diligent about what you really want."

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