

Unable to get a real job, a young Marty Nemko set about to reinvent himself; now the career advisor is famous

Description

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Marty Nemko was on a fast track to become a professor. He earned a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of California-Berkeley, was nominated for the schoolâ??s â??Dissertation of the Yearâ?• and was looking forward to a long and storied career.

But after sending out over 100 resumes, he only got offers for temporary, part-time jobs.

â??I finally landed an interview for a tenured-track position and I was elated,â?• Nemko said. â??It was a dream interview, everyone joking around and laughing.â?• But it was not meant to be. â??When I didnâ??t get that job, I went limp, cried a lot and contemplated my future.â?•

Trying to figure out what to do, Nemko thought about what he valued. He started with his father, a Holocaust survivor. â??He had a small retail store in the Bronx where I grew up. He worked very hard to support his family.â?• Nemko, too, valued hard work and productivity, and using your intelligence to gain insight.

â??I thought about what I cared about, and what I might do well, and somehow I thought about the concept of career counseling,â?• he said, also realizing that â??If no one was going to hire me, I better be self-employed.â?• It wasnâ??t until after he did some research that he discovered his concept was an actual profession.



Marty Nemko

Thirty-five years later, Nemko, 69, is among the nationâ??s most sought-after experts on both career and education issues. He is an author of numerous articles, essays and columns in such publications as Psychology Today, TIME, The Washington Post and U.S. News and World Report. He wrote â??Cool Careers for Dummies,â?• which reached #2 on The Wall Street Journalâ??s business best-seller list in 1989. His most recent book is â??Careers for Dummies.â?•

He has been a guest commentator for his entire career and has appeared on many national television shows. He consults for corporations on employee development and is the rare non-medical professor to teach at University of California-San Francisco Medical School.

Locally, he is most known as the host of â??Work with Marty Nemko,â?• a popular radio talk show that aired for 30 years up until last October on local public station KALW.

His workplace knowledge and career advice come from decades of coaching people in his private practice. He has served more than 5,800 clients looking for a new job or career or managing their current position. They have split fairly evenly between men and women and ranged from teens and

recent college grads to mid-career clients in their 30s and 40s, as well as people in their 50s and 60s.

â??I communicate assertively with my clients,â?• he said. â??Iâ??m solution-oriented and will ask questions to draw people out and help them overcome obstacles. But if they canâ??t come up with their own solutions, I tactfully offer some.â?•

Older clients face bigger challenges

Nemkoâ??s prowess, however, is tested by the over-50 demographic group. Fifty years have passed since Congress outlawed age discrimination, yet it remains a significant and costly problem for workers, their families and our economy, according to a 2018 report by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Particularly so as technology has become central to so many workplaces.

Although Nemko boasts a nearly unblemished client satisfaction rate, he admits he has not been â??unduly successfulâ?• with older clients. Aside from outright ageism, theyâ??re up against employersâ?? legitimate concerns about their technological up-to-dateness, willingness to change, openness to a young boss, their energy levels and how they would fit in the workplace culture.

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â??I can certainly outline best practices, for example, how to position age as a strength, but in the real world, not the world of motivational speakerland, my older clients are having a very tough time of it.â?•

While he canâ??t stop ageism and the fact that there are oodles of applicants for every position, Nemko said he can â??add value on the job, helping his clients with things like running a meeting, public speaking and policy negotiation.â?• He also explores their attitudes about work and todayâ??s workplace culture.

For example, rather than tell people they will have to suck it up and work for a younger boss, he encourages people to explore what has been their experience in dealing with younger bosses. And he advises older clients, â??Donâ??t try to dress like youâ??re 23. Donâ??t use cool language and donâ??t talk about hip-hop.â?• He suggests they brand themselves as experienced and wise in nuanced ways.

Walking through the scary steps

Nemko puts his clients at ease working in his home office in the Oakland hills. â??Even though Iâ??m out to get the job done, Iâ??m very relaxed with clients,â?• he said. â??I curse all the time. Clients love it. It erases tension. When we need to take a break, I play the piano.â?• His musical creds go back to age 14, when he had a job playing piano â??in a bar in the Bronx leading a bunch of drunks in a chorus of â??When Irish Eyes are Smiling.â??â?• These days you might find him playing on cabaret nights at the Marsh.

Helping clients get jobs is often the first step in what Nemko sees as a two-step process. â??Itâ??s actually after they get jobs, that Iâ??m most effective.â?• he said. â??I have a lot of clients that are very successful but want to rise further, be happier on the job â?? or even live in fear that they are going to be axed.â?•

With all the advice Nemko gives his clients, the most important might be the openness to change. â??The only person who likes change is a wet baby,â?• he said. â??It could be scary.â?•

His ability to walk clients through the scary steps of changing jobs or careers is not just limited to his vast practical knowledge in the world of work or his advisory skills. Sometimes, he uses acting as a reinforcement, role-playing different scenarios with clients.



Nemko and his wife, Barbara acting in â??Brighton Beach Memoirsâ?• at the Castro Valley Community Theatre In the Park.

Nemko, in fact, has made successful avocation of playwrighting, acting and directing. He and his wife, Barbara, the Napa County schools superintendent, got into acting 15 years ago, when both landed roles in their local theater production of Neil Simonâ??s â??Brighton Beach Memoirs.â?• He played opposite her as a cheating husband. â??It was all angst on stage, but when we exited to the wings, we laughed and high-fived each other.â?•

Since then, Nemko has written four screenplays, four stage plays and acted in a number of community productions. He wrote and performed in his one-man show, â??Odd Man Out,â?• at Chanticleers, Castro Valleyâ??s Community Theatre In the Park, last year, and was named Best Director for two productions it staged.



Marty Nemko guiding actors in rehearsal for the Chanticleersâ?? production of â??Same Time, Next Year.â?•

It was in 1989, early in his career, that Nemko pitched his eponymous radio show. He had been researching the field of career counseling, watching career counselors and having them watch him, and asking clients he saw for free for honest feedback.

â??Literally, I wrote a two-line letter saying that I thought a useful segment might be one on careers,â?• Nemko said. The producer, who told him she had never received such a brief pitch letter, offered him an hour guest slot. She thought conciseness would make him good on the radio.

When Nemko came home from doing the show, he had received 25 voicemails from people wanting his career and education advising. â??Thatâ??s how I got my first clients, but after that itâ??s been mainly work of mouth.â?•

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