

Case study: Customers with contrasting mindsets

Age Concern Camden

Steve exemplifies a 50+ customer who is inflexible, has unrealistic expectations and only follows advice when it suits him. As a result, he is narrowing his opportunities.

Steve has been a customer for more than two years. He was previously employed as a building manager earning £30,000-40,000 a year. He was expecting to find a job with the same level of responsibility and salary.

His adviser says that while he is unrealistic about his employment opportunities, he is also underselling himself when applying for jobs. He is not able to match his transferable skills and previous experience to the requirements of the job. His CV and personal statement often do not meet the specifications.

He has often asked for advice but has rarely taken it, sometimes going back on decisions reached with the help of his adviser (changing the text of his CV for example).

Initially he was reluctant to consider jobs in other areas or which require a lower level of skills, believing he could find something similar to his past roles. He then started to believe his lack of success was due to his age rather than anything else. He took an NVQ in Security, thinking it would not be too demeaning to work as a security manager or monitor CCTV. However, it proved difficult for him to find such a post in the current economic climate, particularly as he has no previous experience. He rejected the suggestion that he could start at a lower level and work his way up.

Steve's inability to lower his expectations and take things step by step is a barrier. Now he is applying for the sorts of jobs his adviser suggested originally but his employability is decreasing as is the likelihood of finding a job he would want to do.

Matthew (age 50+) is open minded, receptive to ideas and flexible in his approach. He has had a long journey but a successful one. He worked in the construction industry but was made redundant in his early 50s. He wanted to do something different, not least because earnings in construction had gone down significantly in recent years.

Matthew took his redundancy as a chance to change career. As he is fit and likes physical activity and outdoors work he decided to get a qualification as a gardener. He then approached a provider for advice on how to get a gardening job. Although he recognised looking for work was part of his condition to entitlement to benefits, it had left him feeling very stressed.

His adviser suggested he think about a stepping stone: something he could do while looking for gardening work. She asked what he had enjoyed doing

when he was little and Matthew said he had liked helping in the kitchen. He subsequently got a part-time job as a catering assistant. This was a good solution in several ways: it provided some income to live on and left him time to start building up his gardening business. He was fortunate to get another small part-time job as a handyman with a charity helping older people. Through his contacts with people in both his jobs and by distributing marketing leaflets, he obtained some gardening customers. Matthew's gardening business is now growing but he has two small part-time jobs to fall back on.