

Too Young for the Job

Wenroth Consulting says 'deliberate calm' is an ageless skill requirement for 2009

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Quick reflexes. Sharp thinking. Strength and endurance. Composure under pressure. Qualities of the younger worker. Oh really?

Don't tell that to the 155 passengers on US Airways Flight 1549 that crashed into the Hudson River in New York City - all of whom survived.

Not only is the pilot - Capt. Sullenberger - 57 years old. Every member of the crew is over 50. Well actually, the first officer is a spry 49. The flight attendants are 51, 57, and 58.

Wendy Alfus Rothman, business psychologist and career management expert, says that should shake up the traditional notion of retirement and the value of building a substantive work history.

Experience, preparation, impulse control - all add to mental composure and the ability to balance emotions against a more rational and deliberate thought process. Known in psychology as Metacognition, a more user friendly term is "deliberate calm". The ultimate in self-awareness, it is the ability to **see** your own panic and then purposefully choose a different - more appropriate - response.

Staying composed in the face of disaster seems to be an ageless - and essential - skill, whether landing a plane or navigating a tumultuous economy fraught with job insecurity and professional uncertainty. And nothing helps to develop that skill like practice and experience.

Just as with flying a plane, there is a system to managing your career and taking appropriate action in this job market. You need to learn that system to stay marketable. But - also like flying - things often do not go as planned. The ability to adapt, stay focused and calm - whether you are in between positions or trying to keep the one you have - are often aided by broad and deep experience.

Having managed successfully through prior market ups and downs helps bring a realistic perspective to the current business climate. And perspective can defuse contagious and negative emotions that derail career progress. It's a good skill to develop - we'll all be working a long time, and the waters are icy out there.

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