

Not just any job – but the right one. Even at 58.

I had always assumed that we have unemployment insurance so that people without work do not have to accept the very first job that comes along. Society, too, benefits when individuals work where they can truly realise their potential. Yet my client told me: “My advisor at the RAV explained that I had to accept any job offered to me.” So, which is it?

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Zurich, May 2026

That statement made my pulse quicken and brought my directive side to the fore: “And you are looking for a position that genuinely interests you – and for which you are needed!” From her relieved smile I gathered that she saw it much the same way. Apparently, she had been intimidated and feared sanctions. There is a difference between system logic and personal career design. The RAV thinks in terms of what is deemed reasonable. I think in terms of potential.

She made this remark after several sessions as part of an outplacement programme. She described the roles she had been applying for – for instance, receptionist. That unsettled me. In my mind’s eye I saw an underchallenged, bored individual. The uninspired way in which she spoke about these positions suggested that she felt it herself.

Decide for yourself who you are

How had the RAV advisor arrived at that assessment? My client was 58 years old and had lost her well-paid position in the financial services sector after many years. Throughout her career she had held demanding, though not formally highly qualified, roles.

Outplacement was new territory for her. She repeatedly said that never in her life had she

reflected so intensely on herself. She embraced this adventure in much the same way as, years earlier, she had built an independent livelihood abroad.

She invested a great deal of time in storytelling. In doing so, she rediscovered forgotten experiences and recognised the challenges she had mastered.

No change without action

She also uncovered new talents and began to feel pride in her unconventional career path. As her confidence grew, she increasingly dared to apply for positions she would previously have considered “a size too large” – and she was invited to interviews. Her applications were now aimed slightly upwards, as I described in my article “Why you should not apply downwards”. Even if the job search took somewhat longer, the invitations and positive feedback strengthened her resolve.

In the end, she secured a position as a client advisor, with the goal of serving an older clientele. The role was new to her. The recruiters recognised her potential and trusted her – even at 58 – to acquire new knowledge.

She was prepared to make concessions on salary. Not out of resignation, but as a conscious strategic decision in a changed labour-market environment.

“Nearly 60” was not a countdown to retirement for her, but a shift in perspective. And perhaps that is the real task in an era of longer working lives: not to stop earlier – but to think differently.

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