

AGEISM: IT'S NOT EASY BEING SILVER

by Tina Powell

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At first you don't even realize it's there -- much like that first grey hair to appear on your scalp. But slowly ageism starts to rear its ugly head.

I first noticed it when a young colleague asked if I liked crafts. Apparently, her mother liked to do crafts. I was not old enough to be this person's mother.

Next came the offers of seniors' discounts, inquiries about my nonexistent grandchildren, and incorrect assumptions regarding my retirement status. The backhanded compliments added insult to injury, such as, "I hope when I'm your age, I'm as active as you are." And when I went back to school in my fifties to earn a master's degree, I was repeatedly asked what purpose it would serve.

Unfortunately, it's even worse when the questions, assumptions, and ill-conceived compliments stop. It's as if you no longer exist. Poof! You become INVISIBLE. You'll go to social gatherings and no one talks to you. Salesclerks and waiters ignore you. Others talk over you. It's an endless number of rejections from potential employers, academic institutions, and prospective clients. That is, of course, if they bother to respond at all.

Here's the good news. We have the power to fight back. Here are some effective techniques to combat ageism:

1. Be vibrant. If you like working, keep your job. If you want to work, get a job, or start a business. Continue to contribute to society whether that's through your work, your hobby, or as a volunteer.
2. Don't be a Luddite. Embrace new technology and use it. There are a plethora of computer and digital literacy courses available.
3. Keep healthy and active. Doing so will give you the energy you need to reach other goals.
4. Feed your mind with credible news sources, books, blogs, and podcasts. Stay current with what's happening in the world and in your community.
5. Broaden your circle. Your world does not have to shrink as you age. Join clubs, professional organizations, and community groups. Find your crew.
6. Live in the now. Keep up with pop culture, current music, and the latest trends.
7. Never give up. If you aren't getting the job, the opportunity, or the acceptance letter you want, don't let the bastards grind you down. Keep searching till someone says YES.
8. You are the company you keep. Hang out with people younger than you or become a mentor.
9. Surprise people. Overcome age bias with blue nail polish, spiked hair, and a badass leather jacket.
10. Be real. You don't have to colour your hair or use fillers or Botox. Injecting your life with meaning will add so much more to your vitality.

Age truly is just a number. Don't let anyone else define you or limit you. At 58, I started my own social media movement to celebrate women who inspire, achieve, and empower.

Why? Because I damn well felt like it.

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