

BUSINESS

Implausible anti-aging efforts can fail at work

By Anita Bruzzese, GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

There's nothing like finding that first gray hair, is there?

It's a sign that you're aging. But what happens when that gray hair may affect your ability to get -- or keep -- a job?

For many older job seekers and employees worried about looking young enough to be seen as a vital asset to a company, it has meant having plastic surgery. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons reports that 13.1 million plastic surgery procedures, such as facelifts, breast augmentations and Botox, were done in 2010 -- a 5 percent increase from the year before.

Still, not all job seekers or older workers want to take such radical steps and may instead opt for hair color, salon tans and other "tweaks" designed to make them look a little more youthful. However, that doesn't mean their efforts are always successful.

"I see these men who are trying to be a little too GQ," says Maggie Jessup, referring to the men's magazine often featuring fashionable clothes. "They've got this slicked-back hair, fake tans and look like they just stepped off the runway."

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When you're being interviewed for a job, the last thing you want is for the interviewer to be wondering about your bad hair dye job, says Laurie Ruettimann, a former human resources professional with Fortune 500 companies who now

writes and speaks about workplace issues.

"We're staring at your dark hair but seeing gray eyebrows. There's a dissonance, although we may not be able to put our finger on it right away," she says. "So we're thinking about that instead of listening to the great things you can do."

Research shows that when meeting a stranger, we record an impression of that person's face in about a tenth of a second. And our treatment of that person is based on our impression. Ruettimann says that's true of many job interviewers.

"The human resources person is going to make a quick assessment of you. They're going to look at your hair, your clothes and your accessories," she says.

"We're looking to see if you're going to cause trouble down the road if you're hired. If you're smelly and unkempt, co-workers may complain about you. We're looking to see if you're clean and neat, so we don't have to worry about that and can move onto other matters," she says.

Ruettimann and Jessup have suggestions for making a good impression, whether you're applying for a job or just wanting to spiff up your image at your current

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position. Among them:

Avoid hair extremes. "We're a very hair-obsessed society," Jessup says. "Most women over 40 don't look good with flat, straight-ironed hair."

Adds Ruettimann: "Baby boomers shouldn't dye their hair from a box, especially not one or two days before an interview because then you can't fix it if it goes wrong." She suggests highlights from a professional stylist.

Stand tall. "Just maintaining a good posture can take years off your age," Jessup says. "Pick your head up and lift your chin."

Be realistic. "If you go get a boob job or Botox, understand that people are going to be talking about that whenever they see you, and not your abilities," Ruettimann says.

Don't fight the inevitable. No one expects a 55-year-old person to have tight skin or nary a gray hair.

"If Botox makes you feel better about yourself, go for it. But just understand that a brow lift isn't going to get you a promotion," Ruettimann says. ■