

10 Things That Will Help You If You're An Older Job-Seeker

So you are looking for work but are worried that since you are a more mature employee that you might be discriminated against. Here I have 10 things you can do to help this from happening!

The good news: You have vast experience and many employers would be lucky to have you. The bad news: Due to your age and how you handle everything from writing a resume to what you talk about in an interview, you may encounter age discrimination.

Personally I prefer older workers as they are typically more mature, reliable and have vast experience that the team can draw upon, but many employers see older workers as stuck in their ways, unable to learn new software or hardware and not comfortable working for a younger manager.

1. Find out about culture. Employers know better than to address your age, but there is no reason you can't ask your own questions about how you might fit in. (This ties in nicely with an office tour). Ask questions such as "I have worked in several organizations with diverse ages in each department – can I ask about diversity in this department/company/division?" If the manager is in fact several years younger than you are, you could address it by saying "I just interviewed with another company and we discussed how I might feel working for a younger boss and wanted to share with you that this is absolutely no problem...I did in fact report to a younger manager once and he too was concerned...(then proceed to tell him or her specific examples of projects you worked on where you had more experience than the manager and how it worked out well....)

Also, ask for a tour of the office during your interview. I used to stress to all of my candidates to do this, but in your case it is very important. The reason is that you get a very clear sense of the type of people already employed – are they happy, seem disgruntled or are they all of the same age group or cultural background? Even the way the employees look (or don't) look at you and smile will give you a hint as to how you would be received in the company culturally. My recommendation is to ask for a "quick office tour" at the end of your first interview. Look for a company with a good track record of diversity. This means exactly that – if a company is well known for hiring all new graduates, then the chances of gaining employment in such a company when you are older than those in the company may prove difficult.

2. If you have been a manager and the position you are interviewing for is not a manager's position, write your resume in a functional style but leave out titles as much as possible. Better to say Project Management as opposed to V.P. Project Management. The idea is to get the employer to see how you can do the job rather than thinking about how you might not fit in.

3. Talk about the challenge of the position and how there would be things for you to learn in this position. The employer may fear that not only have you "been there done that" and not be open to doing things differently, but they may fear that you may quickly grow bored and leave. This is not to say to lie and say that something is a challenge when it isn't, but think of a few things that you haven't done and stress that in fact you would like to take a few years to learn the role and the company. You may even discuss that although you have significant experience in industry A, that having the opportunity to work within industry B would be a challenge because....The key here is learning and if you communicate that you are a "lifelong learner" and you are not afraid to learn new things, processes and ways of doing things, it will help the employer feel more comfortable in hiring you.

4. Be modern – typically what I have seen is that the older the interviewee, the more formal the attire – and sometimes this can be overkill. Dressing too formally can hurt your interview just as dressing too casually can. For example, leave your double-breasted suit at home and wear dress khakis, a dress shirt, a tie and a sports coat instead. Women should wear suits with pants or a skirt but not a dress. Yes, dress to impress but keeping mind the style and culture of the company and the job before deciding how formal. Also, are your glasses from the 70s and your hairstyle is the same one you have had for 20 years? Perhaps it is time for an update! There is no crime in being a mature job seeker, but the more you try to be modern, the better. Another thing I have noticed with more mature workers is that men typically use cologne and strong aftershave – please use a very light touch or don't use them at all when interviewing as it is a distraction to the interviewer.

5. Keep up to date on software: If you are in fact out of date with some of the newer software programs or office machines, seek out help at your local college or community center. The more versed you are in the current programs, the better – and remember that employers rule out older workers often with questions about software that you can't answer – don't let this happen to you! Do some research by looking through job listings on company websites, job boards and in the paper and take note of the technical skills needed for the area of work you are targeting.

6. Do not put your birth-date on your resume or cover letter (or other personal information like marital status or Social Security # for that matter) – this was commonly done years ago but not only does this lead to potential identify theft but this information will advertise your age. A lot of employers could care less about the age of their employees, but why not let the employer judge you on your experience and accomplishments as opposed to your age?

7. Only list a maximum of 15 years of employment history on your resume– reason for this is that prior to that, your experience may not be as relevant. If it happens that the employer asks about previous experience in an interview, keep it short and sweet and focus more on what you have done more recently. Information overload can happen when you bring out your entire history and the employer may have a hard time remembering what you said! Also, if your diploma or degree was earned more than 20 years ago, just delete the dates on your resume. Some people leave out listing experience beyond 15 years but leave the dates of their education – and this can lead to discrimination.

8. Try not to reminisce. One of the reasons you don't want to go back to your early career on your resume or in the interview is that often employers will want to ask you all about the "good old days" at that mythic company and "are all the rumors true?" Believe me, I have seen employers bring candidates in just for kicks. Stick to talking about the company's current needs and how you can help them fulfill these needs. Talk about similar projects and how you could do the same for them.

9. When negotiating salary when your past salaries have been higher (and you are open and able to earn less), keep in mind that just the fact that you have had a higher salary may be an issue. So when the conversation comes up about salary (bring it up in the first interview if you have had to fill out an application with past salary information) - best to try not to give them the exact salary you were earning before so as not to scare them if their range is less. You could say

"As you know my past roles have been at a more senior level and my salary reflected that. However I am at a different stage in my career now and I am more interested in interesting work than climbing the corporate ladder. I am open to the mid to high end of your salary range and would be happy at that level." If they insist on a specific number, remember that whatever number you give them you would be willing to accept as it is difficult for you to get an employer to change an offer once it is made.

10. Smaller companies are often more open to hiring older workers - for some reason this is a pretty universal truth, so take advantage. Research smaller companies in your area and approach the owners or managers directly - entrepreneurs and small business owners are more risk-taking than managers in large firms, so this would be a good place to start.