

# JOB SEARCH WHEN YOU ARE OVER 50

(June 2020)



## INTRODUCTION

***“Myths and stereotypes are sustained when their validity and accuracy remain unchallenged.”***

Many negative stereotypes regarding older workers are widespread throughout the workforce, even though those stereotypes are entirely untrue for most people aged 50 and older.

As an older worker, you should remember that you'll likely face negative stereotypes from interviewers and employers as you continue your career. Even though they might not know it, *employers need to be made aware of the advantages they'll gain when they hire someone older – and it will be up to you to CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPES and PROVE WHY YOU DESERVE TO BE HIRED.*

## DEBUNKED STEREOTYPES

***Older workers cost too much money:*** many older workers don't require high salaries due to different reasons; also, many older workers have healthcare arrangements that won't put strains on company budgets.

***Older workers are slow (or unwilling) to learn:*** while there is a decline in cognition speed as people grow older, this decline “is offset by the substantial accumulated knowledge of older workers and their capacity to devise ways to be more efficient.” (BC-Center for Retirement Research) “While older workers may require somewhat more time to learn a new skill or process, evidence indicates they have greater retention, higher learning achievement and are far more likely to complete their field of study.” (Cal State Student Grade Comparison).

***Investing in older workers is not worth the investment:*** Hiring older workers may lead to a greater return on investment because they're less likely to quit. (Donald M. Truxillo, Ph.D.; Department of Psychology, Portland State University).

### ***OTHER FINDINGS FROM DR. TRUXILLO:***

Older workers

- Are likely to be more helpful to other employees and the organization;
- Are more likely to comply with safety rules and less likely to experience work injuries;
- Are less likely to participate in counterproductive work behaviors;
- Are less likely to be aggressive;
- Are less likely to participate in substance abuse;
- Are less likely to be tardy or absent from work.

Taken with past research and theory, it's suggested that older workers

- Are just as motivated as younger workers;
- Go out of their way to be helpful to others; and
- May work to compensate for any cognitive declines – *their wisdom possibly being their compensation.*

## ELIMINATING THE NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

### ***Are your skills, credentials or education OUT-OF-DATE?***

Identify your job goal; determine the required credentials; obtain the necessary credentials (don't forget free resources, especially online). If this won't work, try getting a different job, or consider self-employment or entrepreneurial endeavors.

- ***Free online lessons about computers and Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, etc.):***
  - <http://www.gcflearnfree.org>
  - <http://www.meganga.com>

And don't forget free educational videos/tutorials at <http://www.youtube.com>

### ***Do you worry that employers will think you have low energy? Or that your brain is too slow?***

Use upbeat words to describe yourself verbally and on your resume / applications (creative, energetic, adaptable, etc.), and don't forget to act the part! Update your self-presentation – adopt age-appropriate clothing and hairstyles. Smile. Sit up (and stand up) straight. Use a little color in your clothing to project energy. Practice responses that project a sense of energy and enthusiasm. Keep reading and learning new things. Learn new skills for the workplace (software, etc.) – talk about examples of how you use your up-to-date workplace skills to bring about success. Finally, take better care of yourself (proper diet, exercise your body and your brain).

### ***What if employers think you're just waiting until you can afford to retire?***

Project energy in your conversation and physical movements. Focus on recent, relevant employment experience (last 10-15 years) on resumes and applications, as much as possible. Be proactive – address your future career plans (and how they'll benefit the employer), even if the question doesn't come up – practice answering questions like "Where do you see yourself in five years?" Assure the employer that you're not a short-timer.

### ***What if employers believe you'll cost too much money?***

Emphasize (with a straight face) that money isn't your primary concern – show that you're flexible with salary. Emphasize your desires to learn new things, help others, successfully face challenges, etc. Show how you'll be valuable to the employer's bottom line, and demonstrate why you're a good fit for the position.

### ***What if employers are concerned that you won't get along with younger workers?***

Emphasize your positive and productive multigenerational work experiences. Use current terminology and buzzwords for your job/industry. Stay current in your field – read business books, especially about industry trends and team behavior. Stay current in non-work areas of life (entertainment, sports, etc.). Talk about your shared interests with younger people. Don't act in the negative ways that you remember about "old folks" during your younger days!

### ***What if the employer thinks you're "overqualified"?***

Think about what's behind this concern. When an employer says you're overqualified they might be thinking:

- "You're highly experienced – you'll leave for a better opportunity, or you'll get bored and quit"
- "You'll probably go after the interviewer's job if you get hired"
- "Someone with less experience will be easier to train than someone like you"
- "You'll cost too much money"
- "Why would you want a lower-level job after all the things you've done to move up?"

### **Here are some strategies and observations on the "overqualified" issue:**

Possible answers to "Don't you think you're overqualified for this job?":

- "I like to see myself as the best qualified candidate, instead of overqualified."
- "I'm not really overqualified. Your company will just get more bang for their bucks!"
- You could also ask "How do you define overqualified?"

## **ELIMINATING THE NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES – YOUR RESUME**

- From ***The Mature Resume – The Resume with Experience (Life Skills Education, Inc., © 2008)***: "Employers assume that with all your experience, you're going to demand a high wage. One way to head off this 'objection' is for you to note, most likely in your cover letter, that 'my salary requirements are flexible'. Showing you are sensitive to an employer's need to be competitive will make your application stronger, less 'overqualified'."
- Gail Geary, JD writes in her book, ***Over-40 Job Search Guide (Jist Works, © 2005)***: "Avoid the overqualification issue by listing only 10 to 15 years of relevant experience on your resume and no graduation date unless recent."
- Suggestions from ***Over 40 & You're Hired! by Robin Ryan (Penguin Books, © 2009, 2011)***:
  - "The simplest and wisest solution is to look harder for positions you are qualified for."
  - "If you still want to look lower, you may need to make some resume revisions that pull or at the very least tone down some of the higher skills and accomplishments."
  - "Decision makers want you to have a valid reason for being willing to take a step down. Acceptable rationales include wanting to change industries, preferring a job with fewer management demands, wanting to travel less, and needing greater job satisfaction. Some may be attracted to the new organization's products or a humanitarian cause."

Other resume suggestions:

- Always keep your resume updated
- Emphasize relevant accomplishments in your career for previous employers
- Target your resume to specific jobs at specific companies as much as possible – show the evidence that your background matches to what the employer needs
- Use keywords (great online resource: <http://labor.ny.gov/agencyinfo/industrykeywords.shtml>) – usually keywords will be nouns instead of adjectives
- Use today's terminology
- Highlight your technical skills
- Highlight transferable skills as much as possible

- Consider rewording your information – “extensive experience” or “comprehensive experience” instead of “25 years’ experience”, etc.
- Include recent work experience from last 5 – 15 years as much as possible
- Leave out education dates if they’re from more than 10 years ago
- From **Arnie Fertig** (<http://jobhuntercoach.com>):
  - “There is a natural inclination to believe that older workers aren’t up-to-date with their skill sets... Show off recent training courses, certifications, or other credentials.”
  - “Younger managers may feel awkward hiring people who are about as old as their parents Tip: Be aware of the unstated messages you convey... If you don’t want to call attention to your age, don’t lead with age-related language. Instead, start with something like: ‘In my most recent role at Widget Company, I provided value by doing A, B, and C.’”
  - “Hiring authorities fear that older workers are slowing down... Community volunteerism and participation is another way to display [on your resume] that you do more than just what’s expected.”
  - “Resume readers focus on what you have done for the last eight to 12 years. Tip: Remember that the purpose of a resume is to demonstrate your skills and relevant work experience. ... It is perfectly reasonable to limit your resume to positions dating back 10 to 15 years, provided that you include this line: ‘Details of prior professional experience available upon request.’”

#### Interview recommendations:

- **Prepare for tough questions:** “Why do you want to keep working?” (Work on an answer besides “I need money”); “When are you retiring?”; “Don’t you think you’re overqualified for this job?”; “Why are you willing to take a pay cut?”
- **Practice your interviewing skills with someone in a mock interview**, or by yourself in front of a mirror
- **Focus on why you’re a great fit for the company in that job**, and stress the benefits you will bring to employer
- **Anticipate and eliminate the negative stereotypes** when you answer questions!
- From **Mary Eileen Williams** (<http://feistysideoffifty.com/>):
  - **What do you plan to be doing in five years?** “Be positive and a bit vague at the same time, saying something like: ‘I like what I do and think I’m good at it. I’m sure a position such as this would provide me with many enjoyable challenges. I look forward to enlarging my skill set and taking advantage of any career opportunities that come my way.’ (Think: grow with the company/grow with the position.)”
  - **Aren’t you overqualified for the position?** “If this comes up during an interview, it might be a signal that someone on the hiring team may be feeling threatened by you. It’s best to respond to this question in a positive and vague manner, much like the suggestion above: ‘My work gives me great satisfaction. I’m certain that working in a firm such as this will afford me many exciting challenges and opportunities for growth. Each organization is different and I look forward to learning new ways of doing my job and acting as a supportive member of your team.’  
--or--
  - ‘I’m looking for a position where my skills and experience can contribute to the bottom line. Because of my years of experience, I’m sure I can hit the ground running and make a real difference to your team.’”
  - “So plan ahead, recognize these types of questions will be asked and be well-prepared. Above all, anticipate success. Nothing beats a confident candidate with a winning attitude!”
- From **Andrea Coombs** ([http://www.marketwatch.com/Journalists/Andrea\\_Coombes/](http://www.marketwatch.com/Journalists/Andrea_Coombes/)):
  - “The first challenge is to avoid getting discouraged.... Here are tips for mature workers to overcome age bias:
  - Focus on the present. “Rather than talking about your past, talk about how your skills can help the employer now and in the future, said Andrea Kay, career consultant and author of “This Is How to Get Your Next Job.”... Also, be clear about your willingness to try new approaches.”
  - Address unspoken biases head-on.
  - Know your technology. “A common stereotype is that older people don’t understand technology.... Worried about your tech skills? Brush up.”
  - Sell your skills. “Describe your experience in terms of specific skills, aimed at that particular company.... It can be difficult to say ‘I’m an expert in X,’ so try the following alternatives: ‘My bosses have always complimented me on X...’; ‘People always say that I...’; ‘I pride myself on my ability to...’”
  - Look the part. “Contemporary hairstyle, glasses and clothing are necessary... Also, make sure the nonverbal message you’re sending is ‘can-do attitude’. That means an erect posture, firm handshake, and strong voice.”
  - End strong. “End the interview on a positive note to upend the assumption that mature workers don’t have much energy.”

## APPENDICES

Web sites oriented towards older workers and their careers

- <http://www.seniorjobbank.org/index.html> - "Helping Employers connect with the over-50 Talent Pool."
- <http://www.workforce50.com/> - "Career Resources for Boomers and Seniors"
- <http://www.retirementjobs.com/> - "Jobs for people over 50"

These web sites have job search engines and informative articles for seniors continuing their careers.

Other significant web sites for older workers:

- <http://feistysideoffifty.com/>
  - Mary Eileen Williams's web site of information for senior employees

Two web sites offering **free** computer skills training:

- <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/topics/computers/>
- <https://www.meganga.com/>

### ONLINE ARTICLES OF INTEREST

- <http://internover40.blogspot.com/2009/09/7-mistakes-job-seekers-over-50-make.html> - "7 Mistakes Job Seekers Over 50 Make"
- <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/networking-at-50-plus> - suggestions to help you network in your job search more effectively
- <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/cover-letters-for-50-plus-workers> - Cover letter strategies for folks over 50
- <http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-careers/2013/09/04/4-ways-older-job-seekers-may-circumvent-hiring-fears> - Ideas from Artie Fertig to help you overcome age bias in your job search
- [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/job-search-tips\\_b\\_3573617](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/job-search-tips_b_3573617) - Your Post 50 Job Search: 4 Ways To Conquer The Age Factor! by job search expert Mary Eileen Williams
- <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/9-tips-to-help-jobseekers-beat-age-bias-2012-11-21?pagenumber=1> - Advice on age bias from Andrea Coombes
- <https://lifehacker.com/how-can-i-make-sure-my-resume-gets-past-resume-robots-a-5866630> - Article that explains applicant tracking software and how to get your resume past that software screening tool
- <https://www.workitdaily.com/fired-over-50> - Article by Cheryl Simpson that explains how to transition from newly unemployed back to employed by following a simple action plan
- <https://www.aarp.org/work/job-hunting/info-06-2013/create-online-profile-job-search.html> - Why older workers need to be proficient with social media, by Jane Bryant Quinn
- <https://www.aarp.org/aarp-foundation/our-work/income/back-to-work-50-plus/smart-strategies-for-50-plus-jobseekers/>