

RetirementRevised by Mark Miller

Tips for finding a job after age 50: Here's the wisdom of the crowd

Posted on 08 October 2008 by Mark

Permanent URL of this article: <http://retirementrevised.com/column/tips-for-finding-a-job-after-age-50-heres-the-wisdom-of-the-crowd>

Finding a job is challenging for anyone in tough economic times but it's harder if you're over age 50. It's illegal for employers to discriminate based on age, but any older job-seeker will tell you it happens every day.

That reality is colliding with the intent of baby boomers, most of whom hope—and need—to keep working past traditional retirement age. So, what are the best strategies for landing a job when you're over 50?

I posed that question via an informal survey of hundreds of business people who've been on both sides of the hiring desk—employers and job seekers. I did it by querying my network on LinkedIn, the online social network for business people. In just a few hours, I received nearly three dozen passionate, thoughtful responses. Clearly, this is a hot-button issue in the business world.

But my respondents weren't complaining about age discrimination. That's accepted as a fact of life. Instead, they were pushing 50-plus job seekers to adopt smart strategies for selling themselves, networking aggressively, and generally cleaning up their act when it comes to interviewing.

Summarizing the wisdom of the crowd: You can get this done—and here's how:

It's not all about you. “The most important thing in getting a job after 50 is to understand why anyone would hire you,” says Scott Kane, managing director of [Gray Hair Management](#), a career network and coaching organization for senior-level job seekers. “There's one common reason people get hired—when the hiring manager sees the candidate as the solution to their problem.”

Kane and others say older job seekers too often want to talk about themselves in job interviews—narrating their resumes in too much detail, and even showing off the battle scars inflicted by unjust employers of the past.

Leave the history and attitude at the door. Instead, go into interviews prepared to listen and understand your prospective employers current situation and issues. Research the company thoroughly in advance. You're there to find a way to match up the employer's problems with specific areas of your experience that make you the obvious solution.

“Don't whine about your last company, your financial situation, your health or your children,” says J.P. Stein, a career coach and human resources consultant. “The employer really doesn't care. They are interested in earning more revenue, not in providing you with counseling.”

Technology really matters. Most baby boomers are comfortable with basic business technology—computers, the web, e-mail and mobile technology. Still, Luddites lurk in the applicant pool who want to get by on ignorance for the remainder of their working lives.

“You need to know how to use the basic programs on a computer and have an e-mail address that sounds business-like,” says Tim Driver, CEO of Retirementjobs.com.

Adds Susan Ayers Walker, who writes about technology for AARP.org: “Know how to apply the latest technology to your prospective job. If you are applying for a sales job, know about mobile technology like smart phones and Web 2.0 applications, and how to find hotspots for your laptop. If you are applying for a marketing position, then know how to use (Microsoft) Powerpoint, Excel and Publisher and know how to start and/or post to a blog.”

Make the cultural connection. Show younger hiring managers that you're not stuck in the past. “Be brutally honest with yourself,” says executive recruiter Jim Stranberg. “Understand how you are perceived by others—the way you look, the words you use, the attitudes you hold. Clean up your act before you enter the market.”

Network creatively. If you haven't joined LinkedIn, do so immediately. It's free, and with a little investment of time you'll build a useful professional network that can help with your next professional move and build your knowledge. A LinkedIn profile also is a great way to show potential employers that you're up to speed on the web and social networking.

Rick Lopatin, a finance executive who was merged out of a job earlier this year, is a fan of LinkedIn but also focuses on non-virtual networking. He tries to attend as many industry and professional meetings and conferences as possible. He's also tapped into some less traditional networks. “I have attended my 8th grade reunion—a great resource for network expansion!”

Resources

[Employment resources](#) - my links to the most useful job-hunting websites.

[Archive](#) - all career-related articles at RetirementRevised.com

[E-mail etiquette](#) - Scott Kane has an excellent list of do's and don't suggestions for e-mail communication in job hunts. You can download it [here](#) [pdf file].

The LinkedIn conversation

My query on LinkedIn sparked some great discussion on getting hired after age 50. You can view the [entire thread here](#) but here are some of the highlights. I encourage you to post your own thoughts as comments at the bottom of this page - let's keep the dialog going!

Tom Hoglund, partner at Accenture:

Spend less of your time looking at open positions and more of your time creating a position. Look at the companies that need your expertise. Get a personal introduction to a leader using the extensive network you've built over your career. Schedule some face time to talk about what they're trying to accomplish. Listen a lot, but also tell them how you could help them. It worked for me and I love what I'm doing!

Career coach J.P Stein:

I've been on both sides of the desk. I've hired people over the age of 50 and I was hired when I was 50.

Off the top of my head, here are some points for the job applicant to remember.

1. Everything changes so be open to continuously learning new skills.
2. Age is a state of mind — if you act “old” others will see you as being old. If you're energetic, positive, professional and knowledgeable, that's what the interviewer will see, not the amount of gray that's showing in your hair.
3. Don't assume that, because you are older than your peers, you know more than your peers. Everybody brings something of value to the table.
4. Focus on what problems you can solve for the employer, not on how much vacation you want or the size of the office that you “deserve”. If there wasn't a problem, the company wouldn't be spending money to hire a new employee.
5. Show how you can hit the ground running, how your skills from one job apply to the current job and let the new employer know the specific accomplishments you achieved at your previous job.
6. Look professional and give the hiring manager every reason to say “yes”.
7. Spell check your resume, have it done by a professional if necessary, 8. Find something that you're truly interested in an network to find a job/career in that area. That passion is contagious. If you like to fish, maybe you could work for a fishing pole manufacturer or you could rep a line of “wadders.”
9. Don't whine about your last company, you financial situation, your health, your children...etc. The employer really doesn't care. They are interested in earning more revenue, not in providing you with counseling. I know that sounds tough but that's the real world. Company's may have a mission statement that says employees are their most important asset, but when push comes to shove, the company's bottom line is how they determine if they are a successful company or not.
9. Lastly, know that the employer has budgeted for the open position. You may want to earn \$1,000 an hour because you're in debt, but the position may only be worth \$10 an hour to the employer. When there is a big gap between what you want to make and what is being offered, move on. You won't be happy their long-term.

Jean Vertheim, human resources exec:

I would have to say that most folks don't realize that certain dates on their resume hint toward their age. Try to make your resume as “ageless” as possible. This will help guide the hiring manager into focusing on your abilities/skills for that particular position. For example, it's quite an accomplishment to mention that you've received a college degree...especially if it applies directly to your job. However, it's not really necessary to mention the year you graduated. Also, most employers don't really need or want to see much employment history prior to 10 years. This last tip also helps in keeping the resume “ageless” so to speak and gives the candidate a better chance of getting their foot in the door for an interview.

Judi Wunderlich, Director of Recruiting- Web/UX Designers & Developers

–Unless you're going for a top executive level position, do not ‘brag’ that you have “over 30 years” of experience on your resume or in a cover letter. Remove the year you graduated from your resume. Remove the first 10 or more years of jobs, if you

can, from your resume. Do not give anyone with a predisposition to ageism a reason to put your resume in the 'circular file.' Remember, the purpose of a resume is to get you an interview - not get you the job. Therefore you do NOT have to put everything on the resume.

–If you get the interview, watch how you dress and even how you wear your hair. Some (far too many) people make snap judgments based on how you look, and if (in their eyes) you look old-fashioned, you may lose the job on that basis alone. Go out and buy a new dress or suit, get a new hairstyle, cover that gray, and invest in new, stylish eyeglasses. Perception is often everything and you never get a second chance to make a good first impression.

–Don't rest on your laurels! Be open to learning new things whether it be technology or new business processes. The world continues to evolve and move forward - so must you.

–Never, ever, bash anybody or anything during an interview.

–Watch out for giving out the 'been there, done that' vibe. I see this all the time in experienced people. You need to appear excited about everything, no matter that you've been doing it for 30 years and can now do it with your eyes closed.

There's more but this will suffice for now. I am acutely aware of how our culture devalues people over a certain age and ageism DOES exist, but then again I also see how some job seekers ruin their own chances for a good job.

Richard Kelleher, journalist:

As for the advice of "Try to make your resume as "ageless" as possible." It doesn't work. I've walked in the door and have been told the person had an emergency and couldn't make the meeting. I've had 5 minute interviews. There is DEFINITELY age discrimination out there, and EEOC, plus the media, looks the other way.

Bob Rose, trainer and coach

DO NOT make your resume 'ageless.' If you have an BBA and 25 years of work experience don't you think your age within plus minus three years is obvious? Do you look 30 when you come into the interview? Yes, some employers are concerned about your age — don't compound the problem by being worried about it yourself.

Sheila Ellis, strategic business development consultant:

Are you FUN? Do people like working with you? Your resume is half the game. If no one but your mother wants anything to do with you, it doesn't matter how ageless your resume is...you're toast. Be someone that people enjoy having around.

Remain current. Know what Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and the like are and if you like, use them. Ask your children and grandchildren to help you if you're afraid. Kids are fearless about this kind of thing. They know the ropes. The key? Get involved in life as it is TODAY.

And btw, I took dates off of my resume awhile back. But, I was told that it's a Red Flag so??? It's a toss of the dice. But, if your resume starts when Noah built the Ark, you may want to omit that...

Play to your strengths. If you're a home-maker returning to the work-force. You have years of corporate management at the executive level, You have been the head of accounting, the social coordinator and you have experience in conflict management.

When you have been away from the job market for awhile, you have still maintained a living somehow. Rephrase what you have done. You were a free lancer.

50 is the new 30 they say, so we can act like it without guilt. Spruce up your wardrobe with the help of an in-store retail stylist. There is no charge for this service. Look the part of the job you are seeking. And if need be, get a make-over. Ladies can have their makeup done for free at most upper-tier retail stores. I recommend MAC. And perhaps consider lightening your teeth. It takes years off of your face. There are over-the-counter versions but the in-office one is more powerful and faster albeit more expensive.

Lastly, we all know that the little 25 year old whipper-snapper who is the hiring manager, doesn't know half of what we've already forgotten. You will have to use your reverse psychology and BEFRIEND them.

This is war. Your mission? To get hired. Artillery: Your vast experience! Method of Operation: Put them at ease. They get points for a good hire. Let them know that you will make them look good. We are truly an asset but the person that needs to know this most of all is...US.

Jim Stranberg, executive recruiter:

1. Be brutally honest with yourself. Understand how you are perceived by others - the way you look, the words you use, the attitudes you hold (too tightly). Bottom line - clean up your act before you enter the market.
2. It is harder when you're past 50. So, enlarge your network and geographic preferences (if at all possible). Write more approach letters, make more phone calls and become energized by what you're accomplishing day-to-day. **BY ALL MEANS, KEEP MOVING FORWARD.**
3. Make **NO** assumptions about how hard or easy this will be. Sometimes the solution is next store or at least in the next zip code or area code.
4. Have strategies for each unique channel: friends, past employers, advertisements, Internet, network meetings, recruiters.
5. Refresh with recruiters and third parties monthly. Be creative with this - an article or an idea they may use is helpful to differentiate yourself.
6. Don't be hurt when you don't get a response. Most companies and recruiters receive many more overtures than they can handle. The responses you receive will be important so treat them as such and with urgency.
7. Do whatever you need to do to keep yourself in top form. Whether Starbucks and caffeine or an hour of meditation - do what you need and do it with presence.

Marika Stone, co-founder of 2young2retire.com:

Age is just a number, but in this case 50 it is THE point in one's life to look inward before looking for your next job; taking the time (unless you're in a financial crunch) to discover what really makes you excited, what gets you up in the morning. Too many of us settle for something, then settle in to it, whether it is a good fit or not. Finding out what you truly want to do often opens doors to employment you didn't know were there. And when that happens, your passion for the work itself will make you a strong candidate.

Tom Mann, TR Mann Consulting:

As someone who has hired a LOT of people, I'd say there are three key pieces of advice I would give the 50+ set to getting hired:

1. Flexibility – the world, thanks to technology, is changing at record speed. By showing the hiring manager that you are up to date with technology, you are showing you are still in the game.

2. Listen – many more experienced workers are so eager to show their skills off that they do a “history dump.” While it's important to share your relevant skills, how you present is equally important. Show that, while being brilliant you are also fun. Remember, Gen Y doesn't want to feel like they're working with their Mom or Dad. For a great Harvard Business article on this see:
http://www.businessweek.com/managing/content/sep2008/ca2008099_258565.htm?campaign_id=rss_daily

3. Network – getting hired today is very different then it was just ten short years ago. Every job is posted online. Thanks to new networking tools like LinkedIn, Plaxo, and Facebook, there is a good chance that you are just six degrees of separation away from your dream job. Make sure you are maximizing your connections.

Joe Cappo, teacher and public speaker:

Teaching is one way that retired people can get back into the market. Deep into my retirement I started teaching at DePaul University. Most institutions have a high regard for those who have had actual experience in their fields. One advantage is that you can start by being an adjunct professor, teaching one or two courses. If you like the experience (I did) you can try to get into a tenure-track position.

The job is psychically rewarding, not necessarily competitive and pays a modest income. It also is not like a 9-to-5 job.

You may need certain academic background, but life experience also counts toward your qualifications. Also, these requirements differ from one institution to another. Another advantage of teaching is that it forces you to keep up with developments in your field and to continue networking with former colleagues.

Job Interview Questions

Interview Tips & Career Advice Search
 Chicago Job listings-



Local Jobs & Employment

Find the Job That's Right for You Post Your
 Resume Today!

Ads by Google

Tags | [Career](#), [retirement jobs](#)

Copyright © [50+Digital LLC](#). [RetirementRevised](#) is the companion website to Mark Miller's [nationally syndicated newspaper column](#).