

Acing a Job Interview After Age 50

You're certainly qualified, but resting on your laurels won't cut it in an interview. Follow these guidelines to land that job at any age.

By Joe Turner

Have you used one of these common complaints?

- "I was fully qualified, and it makes no sense."
- "They simply don't know how to hire."
- "They told me that I was overqualified."

These are the sort of comments job seekers often make to Randy Block, a seasoned career-transition coach and consultant in the San Francisco Bay area.

If you're an "older" job hunter, more than likely you already know that the ultra-competitive job-search process is especially hard on you. Part of the challenge you're facing is a major generation gap between Baby Boomer job hunters and the Gen-X hiring managers of today. As Block noted, "Thirty-somethings don't want to hire their parents. Unfortunately, that's how we often come across — as their parents."

You can succeed during interviews with younger hiring managers, but you'll want to think and act differently. Here are five places to start :

Show passion for your work

As Block notes, relationships are based on shared values. He believes that shared values make up most of what we call "chemistry." Chemistry is enhanced when we meet others share an interest. This extends to your work, profession or industry.

If there is little passion or commitment from you for your work, how can you expect others to get excited during the interview? On the other hand, if you consider yourself driven or committed to what you do for a living, you'll most likely hit it off with a hiring manager who has the same interest — whatever that person's age.

Be upfront about what's in it for them

Nowadays , employers want to know what you can bring them. Older job seekers may shy away from bragging opportunities like this. But this is one talking point you need to be prepared to get.

Tenure and duties won't cut it. The best way to prepare for an interview is to focus on your personal brand. Prepare a personal brand statement for yourself — a simple sentence that offers three very important selling points about you. First, it should say who you are. Second, it should articulate your greatest strength(s). Third, it should explain the biggest benefit that you bring to your next employer.

The purpose of your brand is to go beyond mere duties and [job listings](#) and get to the "what's in it for them" benefit that will make the employer sit up and take notice.

Offer guidance

Block has found an important disparity between older job seekers and younger hiring managers: Boomers want to be *led*, while Gen Xers want to *manage*. Yet in coaching sessions with young managers, he observed that their leadership skills typically lag behind their management skills.

If you're a Boomer, take note and realize that you might not get the visionary leader you hoped for in your next hiring manager. However, Block says that this might just be an opportunity.

He has discovered that most young managers need help and guidance. They actually appreciate being mentored, coached or advised. They recognize the need, but look at it as a temporary or project-based opportunity.

This may open up an opportunity to sell yourself as a consultant whose many years of expertise can be useful in the role of a temporary coach or mentor. This may be a great meld between the "management versus leadership" dichotomy and increase your opportunities, especially considering companies are hiring more consultants during this economic downturn. As the economy improves, that 1099 contract could well turn into a salaried position.

Think short-term

According to Block and other employment analysts, many companies today view their short-term survival needs as paramount. They're looking for players who can hit the ground now and help them grunt through the next six to nine months. That will require a change in your marketing approach: Phrases like "long-term" and "strategic" won't have the sales impact of a year ago.

Rather than emphasize the long haul in your resume and interview marketing, look instead at selling yourself as an expert who can get in and fix immediate problems quickly and efficiently. Downplay any talk about long-range solutions; instead, focus on clear, results-oriented achievements for short-range problems.

Talk money

Money talks, and it talks loudly. Money can also trump age, so try to get as close to the money as you can when you describe who you are and what you bring to the table.

Keep in mind that all organizations have only two basic needs: revenue and productivity. This is what keeps any top manager up at night. If you can help them, they will seek your advice and counsel. Therefore, come to the interview armed with specific examples of how you can solve their money (or productivity) problem. Your past achievements are examples of how to tackle the similar problems they face today. If you can show yourself to be the problem-solver they need, you'll quickly rise to the short list of candidates. Your goal is to become the "go-to" person for their short-term revenue or productivity problems.

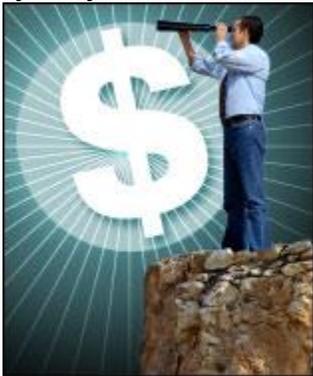
Summary

Gen Xers need your help. Focus on ways you can help their short-term "survivability" through this recession, and get as close as you can to their revenue or productivity concerns. Talk money, and focus on how you can help them produce immediate results. A younger manager would have to be very shortsighted not to explore a working relationship with someone more experienced. Capitalize on your wealth of experience to make a positive difference in the lives and careers of Gen Xers.

<http://hr.theladders.com/career-advice/acing-job-interview-after-age-50>

Avoiding the 'Too Old' Stigma in Your Executive Job Search

By Abby Locke



Startling news for executive job seekers: Age discrimination can affect your career as early as the age of 40. Although there are employment laws to protect job seekers who have passed that milestone, discriminatory practices still occur.

Here are some real, proven strategies that you can apply in your executive job search campaign.

Renew Your Mind.

Have you ever considered that you could be the one sabotaging your own job search? Have you embraced an attitude of defeat that is visible in interviews and networking events? Avoid being the first person to bring up age concerns in any of your verbal and written communications – don't eliminate yourself from the race by talking about “many, many years ago” or “back in my day” when dealing with a potential contact.

Recognize that your age, breadth of experience and wisdom are valuable assets that any employer can use. Be prepared to discuss and give actual examples from your career that demonstrate strategic leadership, problem-solving capabilities and leadership. Count your age as an asset, not a liability.

Develop and Communicate Your Personal Brand.

Don't let your executive job search focus on fighting age-discrimination myths. Work closely with a personal brand coach to explore, identify, develop and communicate your personal brand. Having a solid understanding of your personal brand will help you streamline all aspects of your job search. With a strong personal brand, you can confidently discuss your unique value proposition and the contributions you can bring to an employer.

Maximize the use of your personal brand statement; include it as part of your executive profile on a resume; revise it to create your attention-getting, 30-second elevator pitch; expand upon it through career success stories in an interview; and communicate it frequently to others in networking events.

For example, this is a personal brand statement revised into an elevator pitch.

I am a senior communications manager who has influenced key decision makers at Fortune 500 companies to employ strategies that protected their corporate reputation and positively shaped consumer perception about their product and services.

Create A Stand-Out Resume.

When battling perceptions about age discrimination, you have to be very strategic about developing your resume. Focus on creating an executive resume that positions you as a valuable partner to a company's success right from the beginning. Here are a few techniques to keep in mind:

- Write a powerful executive summary profile that includes your top career achievements.
- Do not list every job in your career, especially those going back to the 1960s.
- Avoid listing outdated job titles and office equipment.
- Emphasize current technology training and computer skills.
- Capture early career experiences and performance highlights in an overview paragraph that lists positions and company names without the dates.

Be Technologically Savvy.

You cannot escape the growing influence of technology in every area of your life, especially in the workplace. A common, overused perception about experienced, older professionals is that they lack adequate technical skills and are uncomfortable with new technology. Address these concerns by enrolling in classes with a local community college or through professional associations to increase your technical proficiency. Overall, do your best to stay current on new technology programs as they relate to e-mail, Internet research, word processing and spreadsheet programs.

Make the Connection in the Interview.

Research the company to understand its needs and long-term business objectives and how your talents and skills fit in. During the interview process, demonstrate the synergies between what you have to offer and the position qualifications the company is seeking. Use this as a tactic to steer unnecessary attention away from age issues.

Consistently draw attention to the value and benefits you bring to an employer (through concrete examples from your career) and show how you influence organizations and play a pivotal role in their long-term growth and success. For example:

As a human resource executive, I have repeatedly created employee relation and incentive programs that have reduced employee turnover by more than 20 percent.

Last, but certainly not least, learn effective networking strategies that will support and benefit you throughout your job search. Reach out to others for advice and feedback through alumni connections, industry associations, former employers and co-workers, and close family and friends. In addition, seek out support groups that deal with executives in a specific age group.

<http://hr.theladders.com/career-advice/age-discrimination-job-search>

Don't Answer That Interview Question

Inappropriate interview questions and how to respond (diplomatically).

By Lisa Vaas



He was in his early 50s, and he looked every bit of it. The questions on the job application went right to his age. After stewing over the form and discarding his first draft, he filled out a second copy. Then, he sat and waited for his interview. As he waited, an attractive, young woman entered the room for a job interview.

She was called in before him. She wound up getting the job. He didn't. He did, however, receive \$50,000 after filing age-discrimination claims with the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC).

The above encounter happened to a friend of Matt Rosen, who shared the story with [TheLadders](#) but asked not to identify his friend.

Rosen has seen employment discrimination from almost every angle. He has been a certified labor and employment attorney since 1981, has worked in human resources since 1995, and recently found himself looking for a new job. He's been on both sides of the interview table and witnessed many inappropriate questions that can lead to discrimination.

"Every place, it's mind-boggling," said Rosen, who recently began HR and legal work for Franklin Street Financial in Florida. "You are always asked for birth dates, for EEOC (-related information such as race and disability status). ... Places, in my viewpoint, just ask for too much."

The reason interviewers ask inappropriate questions varies. Sometimes they discriminate, as they did in the scenario above. Sometimes they need the information for internal statistics, he said.

And then sometimes interviewers are simply trying to make conversation, according to Ellen B. Vance, senior consultant and advisory services practice leader for [Titan Group](#), a Richmond, Va., human-resources consulting firm. "Many inexperienced hiring managers use questions about family as an icebreaker for interviews, not realizing that what seem to them as innocent inquiries about spouse, children, etc., are unlawful."

Most job seekers don't want to sue over these practices. They just want to know how to deal with them diplomatically. Job seekers want to avoid appearing combative and thus jeopardizing their chances of being hired and want to avoid handing over information that can be used against them in discriminatory situations. Knowing what questions to shy away from is the starting point, and knowing how to skirt them is the next step.

Answer the questions they should have asked

Vance typically advises job seekers to redirect inappropriate questions back to the interviewer. For example, if asked whether you have children, you can respond by saying, "It sounds like family is important to you — tell me about yours."

"By redirecting, the applicant is not placed in the situation of being perceived as adversarial," Vance said. If an interviewer presses, she suggests that another response option is, "I am perplexed by your question because I cannot determine why my age/my marital status/my nationality is critical to performing this job. Would you shed some light on why you are asking this question?"

"If that doesn't cause the interviewer to catch their mistake, then the applicant is left only with the option of saying, 'I would prefer not to respond to that question,'" Vance said.

Don't answer these questions

Here are more questions that can and can't be asked, according to HR professionals and the EEOC. In all circumstances, try to find out why an interviewer is asking a particular off-limits question, and then steer the conversation into addressing particular, relevant concerns, in the following ways:

Nationality: It's illegal to ask a job seeker about their nationality, their citizen status, their native language, or how long they've lived here. If asked, instead explain that you're legally able to work in the United States.

Religion: It's not permissible to ask what religion job seekers practice, what religious holidays they observe, or their religious affiliations. If an interviewer probes these verboten areas, try to find out what the interviewer is concerned about and to address these concerns: working certain days of the week, for example, could be a legitimate concern.

Age: Do not answer questions about age beyond stating that you are over the age of 18. Interviewers shouldn't ask how close you are to retirement but can ask what your long-term career goals are.

Marital and family status: While it's permissible for interviewers to ask whether you have ever used another name in work or academic situations, it's not permissible for them to ask questions about your maiden name or marital status. Don't answer questions about whether you have children or what your child-bearing plans are, but do explain whether you're available to work overtime or whether you can travel, particularly on short notice.

Gender: If gender comes up, steer the conversation into what traits and abilities you can bring to the job.

Health and physical abilities: It's inappropriate to ask job seekers if they smoke, drink or take drugs. Your height, weight, use of sick days, presence of disabilities or past operations/sicknesses are similarly off limits. Interviewers do have the right to ask if you've violated company policies regarding alcohol or tobacco, whether you use *illegal* drugs (as opposed to simply "drugs"), whether you're able to lift a given weight or reach items on shelves that are at a particular height, how many workdays you missed in the past year, whether you're physically capable of executing the position's specific duties, and whether you can perform the job with or without reasonable accommodations.

Residence: It is inappropriate to ask how far away a job seeker lives, but it's permissible to ask if the candidate can start work at a given hour or if he is willing to relocate.

Criminal record: It's inappropriate to ask if a job seeker has ever been arrested, but it is permissible to ask if she has ever been convicted of a specific type of crime that relates to the job.

Military service: It is illegal for an employer to discriminate against a member of the National Guard or Reserves, but it is legal to ask if the job seeker anticipates requiring extended time away from work.

If worse comes to worst

If you feel that your employment rights have been violated, you may file a charge of discrimination with the EEOC. Here's the [EEOC's information page](#) on how to do so. The EEOC also provides an in-depth look at [what constitutes discriminatory employment practice](#) under [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA), and the [Age Discrimination in Employment Act](#) (ADEA).