

HOW TO LAND A GREAT JOB WHEN YOU ARE OVER 50

After spending the past seven years in accounts payable at a flooring installation company, Veronica Simmons, age 54 and living in San Diego, is looking for a new administrative position.

As right hand to the chief operations officer, there's no possibility for further promotion. She says she's solved the company's major problems and is looking for a new challenge. But, she said, "there is that demon in my head telling me you're too old." So she sought the services of a professional who helped her build a résumé that highlighted her skills and experience rather than just listing each job chronologically.

Within two months of her job search, she's already been offered two administrative positions — one in the hospital industry and another in the transportation industry. She's continuing to interview and has two more interviews scheduled, since the jobs paid per diem and didn't offer a guaranteed number of hours a week. She's gotten a lot of responses from head hunters and others reaching out to her on LinkedIn. "I'm very excited" about the prospects, she said.

Simmons is among the many age 50 and over looking for a new job. According to a December, 2017 survey by the Transamerica Center for Retirement Studies, 66 percent of baby boomer workers either expect to or are already working past age 65 and do not plan to retire. But it's not always easy for these workers. Though June 2018 unemployment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics paints a rosy picture, with an unemployment rate at 3.1 percent among those over 55, close to record lows, that only tells part of the story. Women-only co-working spaces are the newest rage in the #MeToo age

An April 2018 report by The New School's Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis finds many of these are low-wage jobs. And the unemployment rate only includes those who actively sought work in the last month. Adding in those who want and are available to work, or who are involuntarily working part-time, the over-55 unemployment rate increases to 8.6 percent, or 3.5 million who can't find a job. And a 2017 AARP report found that workers age 50 and over are more likely to experience stagnant wages and dwindling job opportunities.

Starting a job search can be daunting for those with a circa 1980 résumé who last interviewed before the advent of the internet. So how do you get a leg up over your younger counterparts? Experts weighed in with tips on ways older workers can make the best possible impression.

Play up your experience

A recent study conducted by Steven Lindner of The WorkPlace Group in Florham Park, New Jersey, of 1,000 similar résumés indicated that the top predictor of candidates selected for an interview were those with the most relevant, current and continual work experience. Lindner said it's best not to list every job you've had for the past 35 years on your résumé, but instead to focus on the past 10 years of relevant experience.

Describe that experience using current terminology and common language (avoid antiquated terms, like Rolodex or Word Perfect), and don't mention data systems that are no longer used; instead, emphasize your proficiency with programs like Microsoft Office and Excel, he said.

Robert Dagnall, a job-search strategist in San Diego who worked with Simmons, suggested reframing age as a competitive advantage. "It's about performance, not demographics," he said. Focus on what you've accomplished and what you can do for your next employer.

"Be bright. Be brief so it peaks a recruiter's interest," said Paul Wolfe, senior vice president of human resources at Indeed.com, one of the world's largest job sites. Feature a couple of areas where you have depth of experience and highlight projects in a general section of the résumé, he said.
Combat the overqualified stereotype

A big concern about someone being perceived as overqualified is that they would overstep their bounds because they've been in higher roles before or they'd be resistant to change and hold a "this is how I've done it" mentality. To remove this worry, Brittney Beck, a career development specialist in Hinsdale, Illinois, suggests that a candidate provide a specific example of a time they took on a new protocol or method, or perhaps an example where they interacted with all levels of teams and let others take the lead in certain areas.

She says another huge concern obviously with someone overqualified is that they want too much money. If a candidate is prepared to take a pay cut, they should make this known in the hiring process only if the topic of over qualification comes up. If a candidate is not open to a pay cut, they will need to explain their worth with that particular role in mind.

One way to combat the worry of over qualification before even getting asked the question is to tailor your résumé to the position so that your experience seems in line and not far above the position you're applying for.

Stay active in your targeted profession

This means attending professional conferences and taking continual education classes to ensure you remain current and on top of your industry knowledge. This counters the preconceived notion of some employers that older workers are slowing down, Lindner said: "This shows you haven't stopped learning and you're not going to."

Show that you are tech savvy

Beck says your tech skills should match the industry/role you're in. For example, unless you're in an industry (like public relations) where Twitter is king, it's not necessary to have an account just for the sake of saying you have an account. Whatever social media platforms you're on, commit to them. "A half done and unused platform oftentimes looks worse than none at all," she says.

Tech skills extend beyond social media; it's Microsoft Office and other software as well (think Salesforce for salespeople or WorkDay for HR people). Art Koff, founder of RetiredBrains.com, which provides a variety of job-seeking resources, such as interviewing tips, résumé writing assistance and tips for your job search. suggested listing the hardware, software, devices and platforms on which you have worked. Beck, the career development specialist, also said it's key to link your social media platforms to your résumé and incorporate your tech skills throughout your résumé.

Embrace LinkedIn

It's not just for the young. With more than 15 million jobs posted on the site and over 350,000 using LinkedIn recruiting tools to discover and hire talent, it's one of the biggest platforms for finding a job and the perfect place to build your network and brand yourself. Include a photo that indicates you're "not afraid to show your seniority," said Beck. This indicates to hiring managers that you're engaged in the modern hiring process.

Make sure you have an updated LinkedIn profile and that you have a link to your résumé. Include information about your passions and future goals that you don't have room for in a résumé. Blair Decembrele, LinkedIn's career expert, said your profile is an ideal place to highlight your past experience that's most relevant to the job you're seeking. Feature past work you're proud of to show hiring managers what you can do.

She also suggests including your location and desired industry, since 30 percent of recruiters are using location information to search for candidates. You can also turn on Open Candidates on your profile dashboard to quietly signal to recruiters that you're open to new opportunities.
Consider temporary employment

Project-based work is often an effective strategy for getting a job as an older worker, said RetiredBrains.com's Koff. Indicate you're amenable to starting on a part-time or project basis and then being hired full time when you demonstrate your capabilities.

This gives older workers an advantage over their younger counterparts who need the benefits that come from full-time employment, while providing the employer with the opportunity to check out their work ethic and abilities. LinkedIn's ProFinder helps workers find project-based work in place of the typical 9-to-5 profession. A LinkedIn survey found that nearly 50 percent of those on ProFinder are older than 50.

Nail the interview

View the interview as an opportunity to let your employer know how you can help them. Ask what problems the company is facing, what they're trying to accomplish, and why they're hiring, Dagnall said. Then make the interview a conversation about those points, offering your take on some possible solutions, based on your previous experience. "Turn the interview into a free sample of what it's like to work with you and you'll be a much more memorable interview candidate," he said.

Lindner agrees: "Use your experience and wisdom to explain how you can help an employer or hiring manager achieve their goals. That's a real value that older workers possess." He said the interview should also be a place to demonstrate you don't have an ego, that you're comfortable working collaboratively with those much younger than you and that you enjoy transferring your knowledge to those around you.

Dagnall adds that it's crucial to indicate you are trainable and can learn; show the ways you've adopted new ideas and helped manage or execute change recently in your career.

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If possible, start interviewing with an employer that is not necessarily your first choice, Koff said. If you haven't interviewed in quite a while, this allows you to practice your interviewing responses in a low-stakes environment.

Landing a second act

A literature review from the Michigan Retirement Research Center found that between 40 percent and 50 percent of those over 50 change occupations after 50. And a retirement study by Merrill Lynch and Age Wave indicated that 58 percent of working retirees viewed retirement as a chance to move to a different line of work.

For those hoping to switch careers, it's important to build your résumé around the type of skills gleaned from your previous job that are transferable to your new pursuit, says Beck. Be transparent about why you want to switch careers, Lindner said, saying something like, "I'm at a point in my life where I want to take a step back and do something new."

He suggested you approach this type of job hunt as if you're in an early career position and "think young." Go to career fairs and professional conferences to network with people and learn about the industry you want to enter.

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