

How to Overcome Age-Based Excuses Focus on the future – not the past – to overcome the age-based excuses mature job seekers often tell themselves.

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Mature job seekers still face challenges that do not usually concern younger job seekers. So what can executives do to turn age into an asset instead of a liability? Well, putting your focus on the future, and off the past, is the first step.

Here are some of the issues that I've heard in my years coaching and some suggestions on how to overcome these common age-based excuses job seekers tell themselves:

“I have an MBA -- from 1989.”

Never stop pursuing knowledge, continued education and professional development. Without some current educational accomplishments, that degree you got 20 years ago and \$1.00 will get you nothing more than a cup of coffee. The changes in business paradigms, technologies and strategies are evolving at warp speed. Go back to school. Take educational seminars. Do independent research. Participate in industry training programs. Do whatever it takes to stay up to date in your profession. Demonstrate that knowledge through a detailed presentation in your resume or portfolio.

“They won't pay me what I'm worth.”

This is a touchy issue that creates enormous controversy. I wish I had a buck for every time an older executive said to me: “They won't hire me because of my age and compensation level. They won't pay me what I am worth.” Instead of a sign of age discrimination, this may be a signal that it's time to freshen you bona fides. While the executive may have earned significant income in past years, if his experience and education are out of date, and if the market demand has changed, then he must adapt or lose out to other candidates. [Keep up-to-date with tactics to overcome the seniority sticking point.](#)

“I've been in the business for 25 years and won awards for the turnarounds I've had a hand in.”

Many believe that because they did great things in the past, they should continue to be rewarded for those accomplishments now and in the future. Reality check: It doesn't work that way. You cannot rest on your laurels. When seeking a position, do not focus on the past. Rather, create an extraordinary value proposition for what you can do for a company now. Communicate your vision on emerging trends, opportunities and challenges. Show you can be the solution to a company's problems.

“[Industry events] are too draining on my time.”

You should be active in industry associations, trade shows and symposiums. Notice I said "active." Simply being a member in name does absolutely nothing for you. Literally as I was writing this article, I got a call from a prospective client. I mentioned I was speaking at an association meeting in his industry. His comment was, “I stopped going to those when I was a young man because they were too draining on my time.” Guaranteed, he will face “age discrimination.” Another way to demonstrate you are contemporary is to give industry presentations. The presentation does not have to be on a nationwide level. It could be to your local association chapter. Getting published is also a winner. An article published online or in a local association newsletter can demonstrate you are active and current within your industry. You go from being an “expert” to being an “authority,” and you will be sought out. Reference these presentations and activities in your resume, and your age will no longer be a factor.

“I'm familiar with Outlook and the Internet.”

The explosion of computer technology and the Internet is part of our life. It is not enough just to be familiar with the programs that meet your day-to-day needs. Rather, show that you are state-of-the-art through your knowledge and application of new technologies and methodologies. Not sure where to start? [Here's a guide to social-networking and job-search etiquette online.](#) I have to tell you this story. I recently spoke with a self-described “HR guru and change agent.” In our discussion, I asked for his LinkedIn address and told him I would send him an invite. He indicated he was not on any social networking sites and thought they were nothing more than a waste of time. I almost had a heart attack. I advised him how social-networking sites are an awesome resource for recruiting talent, networking with colleagues, participating in industry groups, researching trends, consulting with experts and so on. He was dumbfounded and just didn't get it. Guaranteed he will face “age discrimination.” Some contemporary companies even have executives responsible for encouraging employees to be actively involved in social networking to build brand loyalty and create a contemporary corporate culture. Get connected, or you will be disconnected.

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- [Job Search Strategies for Professionals over 40](#)
- [Should You Finally Get that Degree at 50?](#)
- [You're Too Old for These Olympics](#)
- [50 and Finished, or 50 and Flourishing?](#)

"I'm modern and informed on trends."

[Be contemporary](#). Too many mature professionals stick with old habits. If you are not contemporary in your appearance, you will be perceived as not being contemporary in your ideas or knowledge. Get rid of the horn-rimmed glasses; ties that are too narrow; too wide or out-of-style; and suits, shirts or blouses that don't fit and are worn and frayed. If you look sharp, you will make a positive, energetic impression in the interview.

"You're probably looking for someone younger, but I know I can do the job."

Nothing beats enthusiasm. Don't talk about your grandchildren. Talk about mountaineering, or the marathon you ran, or the tennis tournament you entered, or the college courses you are taking, or the article you just wrote for your industry trade journal. Avoid age issues. For example, don't make the following statements:

- "I'm looking for one more challenge before I retire."
- "Back when I was your age..."
- "I'm 57 years old, but a *young* 57."

Rather than bringing up age issues, you should focus on the needs of the organization and how you can produce results. Further, if an organization discriminates based on age, it will likely discriminate for a multitude of other reasons. You do not want to go to work for that kind of organization.

The job seeker who can demonstrate state-of-the-art expertise with energy, enthusiasm and a zest for living will have many, many years of a productive career. Age discrimination should not be a factor.