

CULTIVATING CAREERS

By Karen Kodzik, Career Consultant

Ageism a barrier to getting hired: Fact or Fiction

A common concern and question from my senior clients is “will my age be a factor in job search?”

As a former HR insider and Career Consultant I explain an employers concerns in hiring “older” workers.

1. They are too expensive – their salary is based on previous tenure vs skill set.
2. They are too expensive (part 2) – from the stand point of what they could cost to a benefit plan.
3. They will coast until retirement
4. They are not current in their knowledge
5. They are not technology savvy
6. They are set in their ways

The fact is we cannot change our chronological number, however there are some strategies to mitigate those concerns of prospective employers so that age does not present a barrier.

1. “Expensive” - I suggest clients know what their skills and experience are worth in the current market and their targeted industry. Use tools like salary.com, money.com for salary surveys as well as talking to their network regarding what a certain skill set is worth. The value of skills and experience, like anything in the market, change in different economic climates.
2. “Expensive in terms of benefits.” This is less of an issue for large companies who have a large pool of employees to average out the risk and cost. This is a much bigger issue for a small company where the cost of benefits is considerably higher. My suggestion to “older” workers – either focus on larger companies, or become insured through other means, like a spouse or private policy. Sometimes you can negotiate a higher salary if you waive benefit coverage.
3. “Coast until retirement.” To mitigate this concern, the “older” worker has to be able to articulate that they still have a lot to contribute. Don’t worry that you can’t offer an employer 10 years – employers these days change directions often and quickly. Touting that you can offer 3 years or so of solid contributions is very attractive to an employer. Older workers also have to

demonstrate that they have the energy to keep up with the ever increasing pace of business.

4. "They are not current in their knowledge." An "older" worker needs to demonstrate that they are up to date with trends in their field. Becoming current means doing your homework, talking to people in your industry, brush off that professional association membership.
5. "Tech savvy." I tell my "older" clients to become familiar and comfortable using technology. The day of personal administrative assistant are close to done. They have to be able to quickly manage a lot of information and data. Become proficient with a Blackberry, iPhone, various software, and laptop.
6. "Stuck in their ways." In job search, in networking conversations, interviews, and in cover letters they have to articulate that they are flexible thinkers and willing to learn new things.

Additionally

Attitude is everything! Every job seeker has to enter the job market with an energetic and positive attitude.

Experienced workers also should shift their message from what they used to do to what they can do moving forward. This includes focusing their resume on recent accomplishments vs job responsibilities from over 20 years ago.

Get current. I tell my older clients to make sure their outward appearance is current and polished including clothes, haircut and style and of glasses.

I also suggest that they leverage experience by talking about how they can jump in quickly, have a shorter learning curve and can draw from best practices gained throughout the years.

Lastly, identify and pursue industries where age and experience hold a higher value.

Ageism may exist but it is just as much a frame of mind. Using some of the suggested strategies will help minimize the effect of age in a job search.