



Job Searching Over 50: Tips for Success

Here's a common question I hear from job seekers: *"How do I deal with age discrimination as an older candidate?"*

Unfortunately, the age at which people start to worry about this seems to be getting younger and younger. Recently, the person asking this question was in their early 40's.

And personally, I take offense! 40 isn't old! Heck, 50 isn't old!

But I do understand that, once you are over the age of 50, you may have some additional concerns that younger job candidates simply don't have. Age discrimination is real. It does happen, and though it's illegal, it's difficult (if not impossible) to prove. I am not a lawyer, so please seek professional guidance if you have questions regarding the law.

I am, however, a career coach. So my job is to help you overcome the age "obstacle" when searching for a job if you happen to be over the age of 50. Here are my favorite tips for success.

1. Don't Psych Yourself Out

The worst thing you can do is allow yourself to get all worked up over the possibility of age discrimination. Trust me: It *will* show through in your conversations with prospective employers and it may make you appear less confident or even angry or resentful if you're not careful.



In reality, older candidates are hired every single day. Just ask your network and you will certainly discover this is the case. You have valuable experience that any organization would be lucky to have.

If you aren't given a job offer, don't jump to the conclusion that it was all about your age. Instead, critically evaluate what you could have done differently in the interview and how you might improve for the future. Also, realize that there could be a whole slew of other reasons you weren't hired, which may or may not have anything to do with you. You likely will never really know the reason why a job offer wasn't extended.

Your role, as a job candidate, is to keep a positive, professional attitude throughout the process, which I know can be difficult. But you have no control over your age. Worrying about it will only create unnecessary stress. Try to focus on the things you can actually do something about.

2. De-Emphasize Age on Your Resume

I don't believe you can truly "hide" your age on a resume. However, there are things you can do to make your age less obvious. Of course, it's worthwhile noting that your age will (more or less) become apparent when you walk into the interview. But you don't have to shine a spotlight on it.

- **Remove Dates on Degrees, But Not Employment Dates**

While it may be tempting to simply remove employment dates as a means of hiding your age on your resume, it's not a good way to go. This is frowned upon by recruiters and hiring managers because it's out-of-step with normal resume conventions. The standard resume lists employment history in reverse chronological order (most recent to oldest). Anything that veers outside of that is automatically viewed as suspicious. The ONLY



reason someone would remove employment dates on a resume is to hide something like their age or an employment gap. Recruiters and hiring managers know this.

You can, however, remove dates associated with your education and any degrees you have obtained. This is one area where it's perfectly fine and no one will give it a second thought. There is no real reason why this is acceptable while removing dates on employment history isn't. I presume it's simply because, with education, timing isn't as important. What matters most is whether or not you have obtained the degree.

- **Focus on Recent and Relevant Experience**

This is the most important point to keep in mind when creating a resume that de-emphasizes your age. For most people, it's also the hardest to implement.

Your resume does not have to be a complete history of your employment experience, especially for an "older" worker. Listing everything could generate a 3 or 4-page resume, and that's not a good look. Standard convention is to keep your resume to 2 pages maximum, which means you will probably have to do some pruning.

The rule of thumb is to focus on relevant and recent experience. Think of it this way—your resume is a marketing brochure. It should highlight what the prospective employer wants to see most. The work you did 15 to 20 years ago is probably not nearly as relevant as the work you've done in the last 10. We all know the workplace has dramatically changed in recent years—technology and trends in *any* field are always evolving. Therefore, the things you achieved in the more distant past are not nearly as applicable in today's world as your more recent achievements.

In general, you want your resume to emphasize the last 10 years of work experience and the key things you did that are most relevant to the role for which you are applying. Anything older than 10 years and not directly related to the current role can be removed.



You can list the title and company in an “Other Experience” section if you wish, but there’s no need to add dates or details. There are exceptions to this rule, of course, but that’s the standard.

- **Focus on Quality, Not Quantity**

Your resume should always be about quality, not quantity. This is true for job seekers of any age. Older professionals might have more to work with, but that doesn’t mean you have to add more to the page. Be discerning; strategically choose the things you want to include and exclude.

I’ve found that older professionals are often concerned with looking “over-qualified”. However, if you hone your experience down and focus only on the most recent and relevant items (quality over quantity), you will look very well-suited for the role, but you won’t overwhelm the reader with your decades of work history and abundant experience.

This can be difficult because most people are proud of their accomplishments and very attached to them; so, they have a hard time removing things. They believe *everything* is high-quality...but even so, you still have to make some decisions and choose only the best stuff. Getting an outside perspective (from a friend or trusted mentor) can help you identify what information adds to your candidacy and what detracts.

3. Proactively Address Common Concerns

As a job seeker, you always want to be thinking from the perspective of a hiring manager. What concerns might they have about hiring an older employee? And, more importantly, how can you proactively address those concerns?

In my experience, the three most common concerns are:



- **Older candidates are not digital natives like the younger generation.** Therefore, they are not as tech savvy. Look, you weren't born with a cell phone in your hand, and that's okay. But you still need to demonstrate that you have a high level of technological proficiency. Consider getting a technical certification or taking some professional development courses. On your resume, try to highlight key achievements that involve technology.
- **Older candidates are set in their ways and resistant to change.** Within a fast moving organization, some managers may worry that older workers will struggle to keep up. Consider how you can demonstrate your agility and openness to new experiences. For example, can you share a story of how you initiated or implemented a major change? Can you discuss some kind of innovative idea you brought to the table?
- **Older candidates are less ambitious and more focused on retirement.** This may or may not be true, depending on the person. Likewise, long-term career ambition may be more or less important, depending on the role. You probably don't want to talk about retirement while job searching, but it's still a good idea to be *reasonably* transparent about your career goals. If you're not interested in "climbing the corporate ladder," you should instead focus on your drive to be successful in *this* role. There are many positions where managers would rather hire a great person who will be happy where they are, rather than an ambitious one who will be eager to move on fast. Alternatively, if you *are* looking to grow your career, be vocal about that too. If retirement is a topic of discussion, don't make any statements about your plans. No one ever knows what the future may hold. You can't make any guarantees, but as far as they need to know, you're looking for a long-term commitment.



Obviously, none of these concerns are “facts.” They are generalized, stereotypical beliefs, and it’s not “right” that people think these things. But they often think them nonetheless. So it’s better to prepare yourself than to pretend it’s not happening.

4. Leverage Your Network

This tip is one that every job seeker can benefit from, but it’s especially useful when you believe there is something about your candidacy that could (from an outsider’s perspective) make you appear to be a “less desirable” candidate.

Of course, your age is not necessarily an obstacle, but your network can help you overcome whatever concerns you or others may have about it.

With a warm introduction from a trusted party, hiring managers are often able to overlook concerns they might otherwise use to rule out a candidate (whether consciously or subconsciously). So, if you think you lack a certain qualification or if you’re worried that you might be competing with a lot of younger candidates, why not reach out to your network and see if someone can put in a good word for you?

At the same time, you can also ask your network to help you identify organizations that might be a good fit for you. Some cultures are just less welcoming to more mature workers, and you probably don’t want to be there. The only way to really know is by talking to current or former employees.

5. Embrace Your Expertise!

Your age is a part of who you are, like it or not. Therefore, you must learn to embrace it.



As an older, more experienced professional, you bring a wealth of wisdom to the table and that deserves to be acknowledged. In the right organization, you can be a great resource for younger, less experienced professionals. Be proud of your career and confident in your abilities.

Apply for the kinds of roles where your experience will be most beneficial. If you're overqualified for a role, you'll need a clear and compelling reason why you're the right candidate (and again, your network can help with that).

I've also worked with a lot of older job seekers who found success transitioning into freelance and independent consultant roles. In this capacity, experience is king and age tends to be much less of a factor.

Lastly, I want to encourage you to go after whatever it is you want in your career and don't let age stand in your way. It's just a number! Do what you can to position yourself in the best possible light, but don't be overly focused on it. Chances are, no one else is thinking about it as much as you.